



PHD

## Creating a fiction: Theatre, creativity and the research process

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**CREATING A FICTION:  
THEATRE, CREATIVITY AND  
THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

SUBMITTED BY SUSAN PATRICIA ABBOTSON  
FOR THE DEGREE OF PH. D.  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH

1986

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DEDICATED TO MY DEAR FRIEND KATHY

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to first of all thank the Today Theatre Company for allowing me to intrude into their organisation, and for providing the inspiration and insights upon which this thesis is based.

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To my family and friends, who have tolerated and supported me throughout the writing of this thesis, goes my deepest affection.

And finally, my love and gratitude to my son, Matthew, whose anarchic scribbles over my work were a valuable reminder of the creative process.

#### NOTES

1. The name of the theatre group, and of all the members cited in this thesis have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the real group.
2. In order to avoid subsuming the female experience within the generic term "his", I have used the possessive pronoun "their" to denote both singular and plural subjects throughout this thesis.

## SUMMARY

This thesis is a study of the creative process of a small 'alternative' theatre group based in London.

In addition to analysing the process of creativity within theatre it depicts the process of the research.

I use the creative process within theatre as a metaphor for understanding interaction generally, and the research process specifically. Drawing upon the analogy between actors interpreting the text and presenting this on stage, and the researcher interpreting data and writing a thesis. I arrive at certain conclusions on the nature of creativity and draw parallels between this and the manner in which individuals interpret reality for themselves and present this to others.

I explore the importance of the actors' perception of their audience in these processes, and suggest that they can be an audience for their own performance.

I introduce the concept of a fictional reality which is often unconsciously created by the individual as an audience to their own fiction. It is a reality which is separate from either the actor's subjective interpretation of reality, or impression management, and is supported by various layers of other fictions.



The key to understanding this concept, I argue, lies in the notion of the subtext which is drawn from theatre. It constitutes the unspoken material implicit within a text which must be interpreted by the actors and conveyed on stage. I extend this metaphor to the research process and present an account of the subjects' behaviour based on my interpretation of the subtext, and thus create a fiction of my own.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SOAP BUBBLES	1
INTRODUCTION	2
SECTION ONE GETTING STARTED	10
CHAPTER ONE SEEING 90%: "THE CREATIVE PROCESS"	17
CHAPTER TWO OUTLINING A PERSPECTIVE	42
SECTION TWO THE PERFORMANCE	72
CHAPTER THREE BEING AN ORDINARY PERSON	75
SECTION THREE THE TODAY THEATRE COMPANY: THE TEXT	107
CHAPTER FOUR GETTING THEIR ACT TOGETHER	120
CHAPTER FIVE PUTTING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD	155
SECTION FOUR A CRITICAL REVIEW	185
CHAPTER SIX HOLDING THE GROUP TOGETHER	189
CHAPTER SEVEN BEYOND PLAYING GAMES	222
CHAPTER EIGHT THE FINAL ACT: THE VIVA	262
BIBLIOGRAPHY	277

SOAP BUBBLES

From years of study and of contemplation  
An old man brews a work of clarity,  
A gay and involved dissertation  
Discoursing on sweet wisdom playfully.

An eager student bent on storming heights  
Has delved in archives and in libraries,  
But adds the touch of genius when he writes  
A first book full of deepest subtleties.

A boy, with bowl and straw sits and blows,  
Filling with breath the bubbles from the bowl.  
Each praises like a hymn, and each one glows,  
Inot the filmy beads he blows his soul.

Old man, student, boy, all these three  
Out of the Maya-foam of the Universe  
Create illusion. None is better or worse.  
But in each of them the Light of Eternity  
Sees its reflection, and burns more joyfully.

Herman Hesse, 1943.

## INTRODUCTION

This is a thesis about creating fictions. It is about creating fictions both metaphorically and literally, and at times combining the two. It is concerned with drawing analogies between the theatrical process, research and human interaction. I shall argue that many of the creative processes necessary to the theatrical performance can be applied both to understanding the research process and to human behaviour. This results in a view of individuals as creative beings, capable of creating fictional realities for themselves, and possibly for others.

I studied the creative process in a small theatre group called Today where I discovered that the more substantive issues such as the management of rehearsals or communication patterns within the group, were of less interest to me, than the theatrical implications of the meanings underlying their actions. By this I mean that I studied their organisational processes as a collective, observed the group interaction, enquired about their financial situation and views on politics and theatre, only to discover that the areas of interest to me lay in the meanings implicit within their behaviour, rather than in their behaviour itself. I eventually began to see a performance within the performance of theatre, sustained by numerous fictional accounts about their group processes.

This study was in many ways an emergent process, arising out of a struggle to understand the contradictions in their behaviour,

and as a result of what I felt, were rather strange accounts of their behaviour. An example of this, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Six was the locating of the blame for the breakdown in collectivism on the particular text they were studying at that time. I felt that throughout the whole period of my involvement with the group I was welcomed in principle, but rejected in practice, through various techniques which held me at a distance from the group. This is an experience which I explore in Chapter Three, where I argue that the researcher's experience constitutes a valuable source of data in itself.

Many of the ideas contained in this thesis result from an interpretive process which fuses personal experience with theoretical perspectives. This was a process which involved me in reflecting upon the fieldwork experience time and time again, trying to make sense out of my observation and interviews. I explored many theoretical avenues which could hopefully link my earlier reading on creativity, theatre and interaction with the fieldwork experience.

This was a frustrating period for me because I could make superficial connections between theories and experience, but felt that I hadn't really made full use of this wealth of data before me. I considered the implications of their behaviour for a tacit theory of power for example; and dwelt on the importance of 'choice' in their actions; as possible links in order to understand their behaviour. I still didn't feel satisfied with

these tentative interpretations of events, however I felt that something was eluding me, but I didn't know what it was.

It was rather like having a series of scenes before me, with no performance to link them together or give them any meaning. Having the text, and the rehearsed scenes, all I then needed was something to connect them and bring them to life. Slowly I began to see the elusive ingredient which could fit all this together. I 'stepped outside' of the more acknowledged theoretical perspectives and started to reconsider the theatrical process as a process of interpretation and presentation of a fiction on a stage. I could see links between this process, and the process of doing research, but more importantly I began to realise that it was an approach that could be applied to human interaction more generally. By taking the notion of the creative artist creating for themselves and adding to this the notion of a fictional reality, I was able to start considering a view of individuals as creative beings, creating fictions for themselves.

I began to see that through understanding the interpretive process within theatre, which often takes as its starting point the meanings implicit within the text rather than the written text alone, that if I drew this analogy from theatre to the research process, I might well have the key to unravelling the theatre group's contradictory behaviour. I had to look beyond their accounts of their behaviour to the meanings implicit within their

actions, and here I discovered the fictional realities that constituted a performance within a performance.

The theatrical process provided the missing ingredient in the interactionist perspective enabling me firstly to consider the actor as performing a fiction for themselves. Drawing this analogy further I realized that in my role as a researcher I could, like the actor, interpret the "subtext" of the Today Theatre Group's performance in order to create my own fiction of their behaviour. I reject the notion of the objective researcher, and make apparent a theory of research as an interpretive process, redesigning events from the researcher's own perspective, even if only by their choosing the order in which the material is presented. It reflects an implicit view of epistemology whereby knowledge is a process subject to constant reinterpretation, temporarily frozen for the purpose of communication.

Throughout this thesis I focus upon my own experience as valuable data which provides the reader with access to the subtext, and also conveys another illustration of the creative process. I ignore many of the stylistic conventions of the academic thesis, preferring to capture the atmosphere of the theatrical process in my writing as well as my theatrical perspective.

The notion of a subtext is central to this thesis and as such needs to be explained at the outset. It is a term which applies

to the meaning implicit within a text which must be interpreted along with the text to give a performance greater meaning. In Creating A Role, Stanislavsky (1963) advises the actor considering a text to look beyond the written word to the author's intentions which underlie a character's behaviour, thereby to and inject the fiction with life:

*"In order to comprehend his intentions you have to take the inanimate printed letters and restore not only his thoughts but his visions, his emotions, feelings, in a word see the whole subtext, which underlies the words in the formal text."*

(Stanislavsky 1963)

Following on from this I have deliberately presented a fiction which relies upon the reader to some extent interpreting the subtext. I have tried to mirror my theoretical perspective in my style of writing leaving the reader to witness the various scenes which constitute the implicit connections between them, although to use the theatrical analogy, there are very apparent stage directions to assist them. For example, in Chapter One, I present in many ways a literature review typical of the customary Ph. D. conventions. It is included partly as an example of a style which I abandon, and partly because it highlights some important theoretical issues which run throughout this thesis. Namely it introduces the notion of the artist as performer for themselves, crucial to the concept of a fictional reality. This is a vital ingredient in the plot which must be carried through the reading



of this thesis, whereas the rest of Chapter One may be accepted as a self-contained subplot.

In Chapter Two I outline the interactionist perspective and highlight the weaknesses inherent in this approach which prevented me from fully coming to grips with Today's behaviour. As an alternative I argue that behaviour may be better understood through the introduction of the concept of an audience and by locating interaction in a social context.

Having presented the reader with a theoretical backdrop to the thesis during which I outline the ideas taken with me to the research process, I move on in Section Two to discuss the execution of the fieldwork itself. In Chapter Three I therefore outline my fieldwork experience, drawing upon my relationship with the Today Theatre Group as a valuable source of data to be interpreted on the basis of the meanings implicit in the behaviour studied. I develop the notion of the reflexive researcher, who, whilst having aims distinct from their subjects, nevertheless tend to behave similarly. Both researcher and researched are making subjective interpretations of events and can create fictions for themselves, though like actors this process tends to be heightened for the researcher who more consciously analyses the subtext than the individual in ordinary life.

This leads us to Section Three, where I switch emphasis from a consideration of the research process to the Today story itself.

The text of this performance is outlined in Chapters Four and Five where I present the Today Theatre Group's account of their behaviour. I focus on the meanings they give to creativity and collectivism which provides the basis for their organisation, and look at their experience of these ideals in practice.

In Section Four I present a critical review of the performance. Thus in Chapter Six I present my interpretation of the theatre group's behaviour, looking at the techniques they use to minimise conflict within the group, and locate blame for their tensions on external factors such as the text. By doing this, in effect, they perpetuate their troubles by avoiding having to deal with them, but at least ensure their group's survival by avoiding the risk of unleashing more destructive tensions.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I tie the threads of these chapters together and develop the theory of a fictional reality which is separate from either impression management (whereby the individual seeks to convince others of a desired impression of self) or from a subjective interpretation of reality whereby the individual internalises their view of reality. A fictional reality is better seen as a separate layer of reality somewhere between the two. It is a reality which, I shall argue, is often unconsciously maintained, although fictions can be deliberately created as in the writing of a novel or a thesis. The process of creating a recognised fiction will, however, often involve the creation of implicit fictions necessary to maintain it. This is a theory

which adds to, rather than replaces, existing interactionist perspectives, and suggests an alternative analysis of human behaviour. As such Chapter Seven is less of a conclusion than a review of a performance which makes sense out of the fieldwork data and the theoretical viewpoints underpinning this thesis. It is also a starting point of a new performance by introducing my interpretation of events to the reader in which I outline a fiction of my own for them to interpret as they wish

Consequently, following Stanislavsky's advice I have tried to create a fiction which conveys a creative interpretation of my fieldwork data:

*"Do not conceal from us the hints you yourselves get from beneath the words, between the lines, the things suggested by Shakespeare just as you yourselves see, hear and sense the life of a human spirit in the play. Be creators, not mere narrators."*

I have tried to avoid a mere narrative, and hope the reader will participate in this performance and enjoy the creative process for themselves too.

SECTION ONE

**GETTING STARTED**

### Setting the scene

In this section I shall set out the scene in which the research was performed. I shall present the socio-historical context in which I interacted with the Today Theatre Company, and highlight the theoretical perspectives taken with me to both the fieldwork setting, and as a consequence of this, underlying this thesis as a whole.

I began this research project in October 1981 with the usual problems faced by the research student. I had enthusiastically read a wide variety of theoretical texts on, for example, theatre, creativity, the role of art in society, and human behaviour, leaving myself with numerous ideas but no direction. Slowly I sifted through these ideas omitting those which I felt I didn't want to pursue but, leaving myself with an open approach which could enable me to respond to issues arising out of the fieldwork.

Thus my attention turned to the problem of finding a fieldwork setting. Coincidentally, it was around this time that I became aware of the 'Women Live Campaign' which sought to promote a month of women's events in May 1982. As a feminist and avid follower of 'Alternative Theatre' I felt that this was an opportunity not to be missed. I decided to explore the Woman Live Campaign further, and hoped to participate in the May events as a researcher, thus possibly gaining some interesting data whilst supporting their initiative.

The Women Live Campaign, created under the umbrella of 'Women In Entertainment', sought to redress the balance between the sexes in the entertainment industry. They argued that whilst there are numerous women in the acting profession, there are very few women writers or directors, and consequently few women with any power. They were also highly critical of most of the material performed in the various entertainment professions, arguing that they perpetuated sexist stereotypes of women, rather than reflect womens' lives and experiences as seen by women.

Their ethos was summed up in their publicity blurb in the following way:

*"Women Live covers the entire entertainment industry: film, TV, theatre, radio, music, dance and visual arts. Women Live highlights areas where women often remain hidden, in behind the scenes occupations and technical fields. Women Live provides an opportunity to reflect Womens' Lives and experiences in a more varied, daring way than the stereotypical media images usually permit."*

The Women Live Campaign was coordinated nationally through the Women In Entertainment offices in London. Throughout the regions Women Live groups were set up to focus on local theatre companies, radio stations and television companies to try and encourage them to put on something during May which challenged female stereotypes, and was written, performed and produced by women.

Womens' theatre groups throughout the country were encouraged to perform during this campaign in order to make womens' theatre visible on a national basis. Educational and youth projects were set up to provide information and workshops for girls on the range of careers in the entertainments industry, with an emphasis upon encouraging girls to apply for jobs in the more traditionally male-dominated areas. Thus, whilst Women Live was concentrated on May 1982, it was hoped it would serve as a springboard for the future.

I visited the South-West Women Live coordinator in Bristol where I gained some valuable insights into the role of women in the entertainment industry, I spoke to many of the performers taking part in the campaign through May and gained some understanding of the difficulties faced by women in particular, and alternative theatre generally.

In fact I spent several weeks with the Women Live Campaign in Bristol, where a group of women selected four plays written by women and appointed four women directors to cast and direct them. I chose to follow one of these directors through the audition and rehearsal process. I observed most of the rehearsals and the first lunch time performance of the play. I spoke to the performers and the director about their feelings on their work and about their reasons for participating in the Women Live Campaign.

To my great surprise none of the actors cared about the political implications of the campaign, and were simply glad to have found work. They argued that they did not need any political principles to perform the play successfully, because after all, they argued, one could play a murderer without agreeing with murder.

This was my first insight into the distinction between the researcher's assumptions and the issues of concern for their subjects of the research. I realised that it was pointless asking questions which reflected my own a priori assumptions about politics and theatre, and must focus on the meanings given to their work by the actors concerned. This was an experience useful for a second reason that it provided me with the opportunity to observe a director in control of her performers, controlling the creative process of the play.

During this time I met with various theatre groups, albeit briefly, and gained insights into the various organisational structures possible within theatre. There was a range from the traditional directocracy mentioned above to a variety of collectives, one of which chose to collectively appoint a director to control the rehearsal process alone, to others which tried to operate collectively throughout the entire creative process.

I also discovered that all these various groups felt threatened by an 'outsider' wanting to observe the rehearsal



process. One group having told me that I could study them, turned me down at the last minute and only permitted me access to one collective meeting. I felt that there was a mystique around theatre which no-one wanted to be broken down.

Eventually I was granted access by the Today Theatre Company, the subjects of this thesis. We negotiated my entry on the basis that they believed that creativity was a process and as such could be observed during the rehearsal process as well as during a performance. I was delighted that finally a group were prepared to allow an outsider into their enclave, though from my past experiences with other groups felt that this was a position not to be taken-for-granted. I was also aware of the need to sensitize myself to their experiences, and consider the meanings they gave to their behaviour, rather than impose various issues upon them.

Thus it was that I decided to focus upon one group in detail having already discovered a wealth of differences between every group or performer I had spoken to. I knew that I must be tactful in my approach to the fieldwork, but recognised that my reading and discussion with Women In Entertainment were to provide ideological assumptions which were to inevitably influence my interpretation of events during the fieldwork encounter.

In the following two chapters I shall expand upon the theoretical perspective from which their behaviour was observed in more detail, providing the reader with a theoretical framework

from which they can follow the fieldwork performance outlined in chapter two.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SEEKING 90%: "THE CREATIVE PROCESS"

*"This odd word is now part of psychological jargon, and covers everything from the answers to a particular kind of psychology test, to forming a good relationship with one's wife. 'Creativity', in other words, applies to all those qualities of which psychologists approve. And like so many virtues - justice for example - it is as difficult to disapprove of as to say what it means."*

(Hudson 1966)

When I started this research I would tell friends that I was studying 'creativity'. It was not long, however, before I realised that this was not the case. I was in fact studying 'the creative process', there being no definitive process which can be followed like a recipe for wholemeal bread.

I soon discovered that there was a mysterious shroud enveloping the concept of creativity which was perpetuated by artists and researchers alike. They both, I felt, tried to maintain that creativity cannot be properly understood, even by the creators themselves - the recipients of this 'magical gift'. I noticed that barriers were erected by the subjects of my study to maintain some of the mystery around their work whilst researchers, in their own way, unconsciously perpetuate this

through a tendency to concentrate on looking at the artist rather than the process of making. The final piece of work presented by the artist is taken as the starting point for understanding, with research looking to the artists life or psychoanalytical qualities. The result being an inadvertent conspiracy to hide the rough, unromantic edges of the creative process.

Stein (1974) criticises the majority of the studies of creativity for being of the empirical research variety. He argues that tests and questionnaires usually constructed for a variety of purposes are used to learn more about creativity. The other method used is the 'hypothetical deductive' method where a hypothesis is developed and test questions are related to it. Creativity when studied in the laboratory is removed from any socio-economic or historical context essential to a fuller understanding of the overall creative process. For example, McGrath (1981) argues that in order to understand theatre fully it is essential to place it in its social environment rather than to simply concentrate on the theatrical elements of the creative process:

*"Not only must the text, mise-en-scene, lighting, performance, casting, music, effects, placing on the stage all be taken into account in order to arrive at the description of the stage event, but also the nature of the audience, the nature, social, geographical and physical, of the venue, the price of the tickets, the availability of the tickets, the nature and*

*placing of the pre-publicity, where the nearest pub is, and the relationships between all these considerations themselves and of each with what is happening on stage. For when we are discussing theatre, we are discussing a social event, and very complex social event, with a long history and many elements, each element also having a long and independent history."*

I have worked in this thesis on the premise that creativity can be understood as a process like any other organisational process. Creativity can be seen as a potential which, given the right conditions and discipline, can be developed in all of us. I am critical of what I term a 'product orientation' whereby too much emphasis is placed on either evaluating recognizing masterpieces or dwelling upon the life histories of acknowledged creative individuals, ignoring that people can be creative from a process perspective. Their creativity resting in the newness of the experience for the creator alone. Thus understanding the role of the audience, the critics who evaluate the creativity of the work, and the meaning given to the concept of creativity more fully.

An essential part of this work is the distinction between the creative product and the creative process. The first is a tangible item which can be judged against certain criteria. The problem in this case being which criteria to use, and whose judgement to accept.

Jackson and Messick (1965) define a creative product as something which has "*novelty, appropriateness, transformation and condensation.*" The product must now be novel, appropriate to its context (some suggestions may be novel but obtuse), involve the production of new forms through the transformation of existing ideas, and finally the product must not divulge all its meaning with the first impact.

Similarly, Stein (1974) argues that the aspect of a product that makes it creative is its novelty arising from a reintegration of existing materials or knowledge. For Stein, however, this novelty needs to represent a 'leap' away from that which has previously existed:

*"The final product that is called creative changes the course of future actions and behaviour. It alters our way of looking at things and it opens up new vistas that stimulate still further creativity."*

(Stein 1974)

Originality and appropriateness within its context seem to be the key elements in definitions of creativity for Pelz and Andrews (1966). They argue that a person's work is creative when "*others have found this performance both original and in some way useful.*"

There is a problem with all these definitions in that they all involve some significant other in making an evaluation. They are

then supposedly applying objective criteria to assess what is essentially a subjective phenomenon. No mention is made of who evaluates the work or of any value position taken by them. Wolff (1981) argues that it is vital to point out that judges do bring to bear in their assessments specific ideological values which are culturally and historically bound. Brecht (1964) writing in the thirties noted that society will only accept as art works that do not challenge the existing order, art is not a harmless luxury on the sidelines of society and because of this ideology comes into its assessment. Brecht argues that:

*"Society only absorbs via the apparatus what it needs to reproduce itself. An innovation will therefore only pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate the existing society, not if it is going to challenge it."*

(Brecht 1964)

For many political theorists there is no separation between art and politics. Marx (1973) for example, argues that a writer is creative only when they criticise society by opposing the dominant ideology:

*"It is only when the writer transcends his immediate class position that a truthful depiction of society and man's historical living relation within it becomes possible."*

(Marx 1973)

On a similar theme Brecht (1964) notes that *"Art is never without consequences"*, and that *"for art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group."*

Whilst Fischer (1959), a socialist realist, argues that a creative art is one which expresses man's alienation within capitalist society:

*"One of the great functions of art in an age of immense mechanical power is to show that free decision exists and that man is capable of creating the situation he wants and needs."*

(Fischer 1959)

It would be naïve to assume that art, being for some a form of a political expression, and being criticised for maintaining a dominant class ideology by others, that art critics who assess creativity can somehow apply objective standards free from any preconceptions typical of their socio-historical position. Similarly researchers have particular value positions which influence how they set about looking at creativity and what they seek to discover.

Wolff (1981) is critical of the vast majority of theories of creativity because, she argues, they omit any account of production which serves to cloud our understanding of creativity, shrouding it in mystique rather than making it more accessible:



*"The various theories of creation all ignore the process of making: they omit any account of production. One can create undiminished, so, paradoxically, creation is the release of what is already there; or, one is witness of a sudden apparition and then creation is an irruption, an epiphany, a mystery. In both instances any possible explanation of the change has been done away with; in the former, nothing has happened; and in the latter what has happened is inexplicable. All speculation over man the creator is intended to eliminate a real knowledge; the 'creative process' is, precisely, not a process, a labor, it is a religious formula to be found on funeral monuments."*

(Wolff 1981)

Wolff refuses to talk of creation replacing it with production. She prefers to discuss a work of art as a cultural product which is the result of a complex mixture of economic, social and ideological factors owing its existence to the particular practice of an individual located within the social structure. Art is then a mixture of structure and action and similarly, *"the judges of art are themselves socially defined and constituted,"* with specific ideological and positional values.

Adopting a historical perspective Wolff points to the early fifteenth century where art was a communal activity based in Guild workshops. It was the rise of the merchant classes in Italy and France coupled with the rise of humanist thought in philosophy and

religion which led to the development of the artist as a unique and gifted individual.

Likewise Nochlin (1971) cited the Renaissance as the turning point in our view of the artist. When previously it was accepted as a communal activity, it has been replaced by an image, which she argues, women in particular find it hard to identify, and consequently few women try to express their creative potential. She describes the image of the great artist as:

*"Unique, god like, subject of a hundred monographs, bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence, rather like the golden nugget in Mrs Crass's chicken soup, called genius or talent, which must always out, no matter how unlikely or unpromising the circumstances."*

(Nochlin 1971)

Nochlin (1971) and Wolff (1981) highlight some of the problems inherent in an approach to creativity which concentrates on the final product. Creativity becomes a metaphysical phenomenon whilst the artist is portrayed as an isolated genius often alienated from a hostile society. We all carry within us the myth of the dedicated artist starving in 'his' garret. Creativity when looked at from this product orientation is seen as an elusive phenomenon to be marvelled at rather than understood. It is described in much of the literature in terms which help perpetuate its mystery rather than encourage understanding.

*"Creation involves intense motivation, transcendence of time and space, concentration, and the unearthing of unconscious matter. The creative process is the mirror image of dreaming with special types of structurally and functionally reflecting and obverse cognitive operations producing creations."*

(Rothenberg 1979)

Whilst Arieti (1976) likens it to a metaphysical experience whereby:

*"The artist feels as if he has touched the universal. The particular of the new unity that he has created, seems to have incorporated the universal to have become 'concrete universal' that transcends space and time....the quality of universality seems to come from two achievements, the enlargement of reality that everybody will acknowledge; and the transformation of an endocept into a conscious and vivid experience in the inner reality of men."*

(Arieti 1976)

Creativity is described as a gift which lies beyond the artist's control:

*Creativity "by its very nature is spontaneous inner directed, ordinarily not capable of being elicited at will, therefore it is unpredictable and escapes manipulation and control."*

(Mooney 1976)

This assumption that creativity cannot itself be understood underlies the personality trait test approach to creativity. Creativity is a mysterious phenomenon which cannot be controlled so let us try and understand the people who create instead.

Barron (1957) lists eight tests indicative of originality which are then correlated to check whether an original person is consistently original. These tests include asking subjects to list six uses to which common objects can be put, and a test which requests subjects to write titles to various plots. Once the original persons are identified they are then tested for personality characteristics. Barron has a hypothesis of the creative personality which he tests against these high original response scorers. He tests the hypothesis that original persons prefer complexity by using the Barron-Welsh Art Scale of the Figure Preference Test. Preference for complex, asymmetrical figures confirming his hypothesis.

Mackinson (1970) conducts similar experiments and summarises that the creative architect is characterised by:

*"....his high level of effective intelligence his openness to experience, his freedom from petty restraint and impoverishing inhibitions, his aesthetic sensitivity, his cognitive flexibility."*

(Mackinson 1970)

This tells us nothing about how an architect works or even what he does and why.

There has been a movement away from this concentration on the individual by more recent theorists. Becker (1974) criticises this emphasis on the individual artist because it ignores the role of 'support personnel', the technicians who assist the work process, and the people who supply expert knowledge and advice. Even the artist who works alone swaps ideas with colleagues and utilises equipment designed by other people. Their work is often a reflection of, or a reaction to contemporary attitudes and ideas.

Powell (1976) insists on dispelling a romanticism around creativity with harsh material realities. He looked at the world of publishing and argues that whether or not something will be a financial success determines whether or not an author's idea is published. Writing a novel is not the completion of the creative process, convincing publishers to take on the book, shops to buy it and customers to read it, are all part of the process.

Creativity he argues, can be big business, and so marketing, advertising and publicity must all be part of that process. Editors, he points out, spend more time negotiating deals, consulting with lawyers, corporate and market managers than with authors or fellow editors.

Clive Davis, head of CBS and Arista records, notes that:

*"....being in music is much like being in the shoe business, both are fashion conscious consumer product industries in which the problems of merchandising, promotion, inventory control and successfully predicting or shaping consumer tastes are essential to financial success."*

(Powell 1976)

So far I have established that creativity is a value-laden concept, involving some elements of newness and condensation of meaning, but that there are problems with this approach in as much as it concentrates on the final product. This has partly reinforced and partly resulted from the ideas that creativity is a gift for a talented few who generally work on their own, though in reality this is a romantic generalisation that is not in fact the case.

I think it is important to point out that creativity does not lie simply with the 'professions' but can also be a personal experience for 'ordinary' people. A person may experiment with herbs and spices to break the daily routine of feeding the family. The end result may not be Cordon Bleu but could be described as a creative dish for the individual involved: creativity thus arising from a process rather than the final product.

The concept of creativity can be applied to the finger paintings of children who may be producing something typical for their age group which has been produced by hundreds of other children of a similar age, and thus lacks originality, but is a new experience for the child involved. Kneller (1965) argues this very point:

*We create when we discover and express an idea, artifact or form of behaviour that is new to us, I say new to us because one person's discovery of what has been revealed by others is still a creative achievement."*

(Kneller 1965)

I shall therefore distinguish between two types of creative work: the first type being viewed from the perspective of process, the end result of which may or may not in itself be original; the creativity here lying in the learning or experiential situation. The second type of creativity is seen from a product perspective: here the final piece of work is critically evaluated by some expert, given a financial value and placed in a specific institution for our appreciation, be it a theatre or an art gallery. The difference between the two perspectives being original intention, anticipated audience and the definition of creativity which is applied.

The final piece of work will depend largely on a question of meaning. If a person is concerned with experimentation then their

final product will differ from a person whose concern is with the final piece. This will depend upon why they are creating and for whom. Thus those who are creating largely for themselves for the sake of doing something new can be described as having a process orientation, whilst those whose concern is with hiding the chaos of the creative process and making a marketable product will have more of a product orientation. Research has assumed this product orientation as an objective concept which can be studied under laboratory conditions ignoring the whole question of interpretation and meaning. It is this very assumption that creativity is an objective concept which underlies the use of quantitative methods like the psychological trait tests. I have criticised these approaches because they fail to question their own a priori assumptions of individualism and genius, with the result of generating a mystique which Mochlin (1981) and Parker and Pollock (1981) argue prevent people from realising their creative potential.

By looking at creativity within a laboratory situation they can ignore the social structure which may contain barriers towards people expressing their creativity - one of which being the ideology of the creative genius which they help perpetuate. Secondly, they can only discover a creative individual and ignore how this potential is realized.

Storr (1972) criticises the psychological trait approach for failing to explain this problem. He argues that such an approach



fails to explain why some gifted persons have made little use of their talent. This point is extremely important for it highlights the need to look at the creative process. Inspiration alone is not enough, it needs to be channelled towards some end for creativity to be realized.

By looking at the creative process, rather than the creator, we can identify some of the obstacles which prevent the realization of creative potential, and hopefully see how some of them can be overcome. It has been said that creativity is 10 per cent inspiration, 90 per cent perspiration. The 10 per cent, it has been suggested, is beyond our understanding, and the 90 per cent is often overlooked. I want to focus on the 90 per cent, the creative process through which ideas are generated, developed and finally communicated to an audience.

Rothenberg (1979) likens creativity to the myth of Pallas Athena born full grown from the head of Zeus. Like Athena creative works spring out of their creators from nowhere at all. He is concerned with viewing the Goddess as she is emerging by focusing on:

*"....the thought processes, the affects, the experiences and the psychodynamic structure of the psychological events connected to creating."*

(Rothenberg 1979)

Rothenburg admits that culture and historical factors play an important role in creativity, though he argues, because it is difficult to isolate a particular individual's contribution, he prefers to take these factors for granted. By concentrating on the individual removed from their socio-economic background, and by focusing only on the acceptably creative he does little, I feel, to break down the creative genius myth despite his protestations to the contrary.

Gordon (1961) tried to study the creative process whilst it was in action. He argued that:

*"....the only way to learn about creative process is to try and gain insight into the underlying, non-rational, free-associative concepts which flow under the articulated surface phenomena."*

(Gordon 1961)

He developed a theory of "synectics" which applies to the integration of diverse individuals into a problem-stating, problem-solving group. He identified a creative ability whereby an individual gets an original idea useful for the problem at hand; and identified three situations which enhanced the payoff from this. He recommends that scientists work on a project or specialize in an area for a relatively short time. That they should be part of a work team where coordination was not too high;

and that there should be good facilities for communicating new ideas for others.

Gordon's work is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is a departure from the individual genius model, looking at creativity in a group setting; and secondly, because it moves away from the individual attributes to the creative environment. He makes an important contribution to our understanding of creativity but, ironically, I feel that he becomes too concerned with structural factors which influence creativity and ignores the important role played by the actors themselves.

Stein (1974) provides some of the best work on the creative process which he discusses at length. He outlines three stages in the creative process: hypothesis formation which starts after preparation and ends with the formation of a tentative idea; hypothesis testing, which involves determining whether or not the idea will work; and communication which involves presenting the final product so that others may react to and possibly accept it. These stages, he argues, do not occur in a systematic and orderly way, but will in fact become more salient at some times than others.

Whilst he outlines the psychological traits of the creative individual, he is quite quick to point out that within a group situation no one individual need possess all these attributes as different members hopefully will bring the various ingredients of

the creative personality. In a group context one is more concerned with managing these ideas and overcoming the blocks to receiving or expressing them.

In the hypothesis formation stage one is more concerned with generating a variety of ideas from the group members, although as the creative process proceeds, evaluation and criticism of the work become important too. Control and discipline, he argues, become an important part of the groups relationship. At this point, argues Stein, the private experience becomes a state of expression requiring the individual to be both creator and audience. In the third stage communication with others becomes paramount and the problems experienced in the process must be eliminated.

Stein's work provides some important contributions to the understanding of the creative process. He stresses the need for discipline to develop and do justice to good ideas. However, one failure is that it is rather too descriptive, lacking in analysis of problems found by groups, overlooking the importance of interaction and the meaning given to their work by the artists. He presents his ideas in a vacuum freed from the idiosyncracies of actors and the constraints of the social structure.

As Kalter (1979) remarks in her introduction to actors on acting:

*"Once the decision to become an actor is made, it is not a life lived purely on inspiration and three pomegranite seeds a day. It is a constant struggle for economic survival and artistic significance in a world that is increasingly commercial and spiritually barren."*

(Kalter 1979)

Mangham (1981, 1984) has studied creativity within a more traditionally creative environment, concentrating on the relationship between director and cast. From this he is able to gain valuable insights not only into the workings of creative individuals, but identifies obstacles to creative processes in other organisations. He argues that many organisations deliberately construct barriers to creativity through an intolerance to any form of deviancy. Many organisations lack creativity through fostering "thoroughly constraining situational scripts" which simply encourage more of the same.

Whilst Mangham's work places creativity within a group situation and considers the meaning given to the work by the actors themselves, he chooses to study a traditional theatre setting where the creative control is largely in the hands of the director who tries to encourage the creative potential within the group. There is always the nagging question within this situation asked by Kalter (1979), whether the actor is an original creator or simply the embodiment of the writers' and directors' whim.

Wandor (1980) suggests that actors in traditional theatre companies often have the least creative control over their work, and as a response to this, alternative theatre companies have developed which rectifies this situation:

*"The alternative theatre companies have been largely performer managed: a feature which highlights the fact that in traditional theatre work the performer is the least powerful in the creative process. Since the demise of the actor/manager (or the occasional actress/manager), the performer has generally come to be seen as an interpreter of texts and/or the director's intentions."*

(Wandor 1980)

Theatre is different from creativity within the fine arts because there is the thorny problem of deciding where responsibility and credit for any creativity lies. A good script is an essential ingredient of any enjoyable performance, as is costume, lighting, and stagemanagement. However, it is usually actors and directors who receive most of the praise.

It becomes very difficult to single out individuals specifically responsible for making a performance successful, for a show will only be second rate, even with the most talented actors, if they have poor materials and direction.

Secondly, the creative product within theatre is the performance. This is not a fixed entity like a painting which once it is complete undergoes no further modifications. The human element, however, in theatre means that every performance will change slightly. For this very reason Craig (1911) argues that theatre is in fact not art. A performance is only a semi-permanent stage in a creative process, though for the particular audience on any one night, it is a final product which can be critically assessed, rendering every actor as good as their last performance.

Craig argues, at the time of writing in 1911, that actors could only impersonate and interpret, though he hoped that in future they would represent and interpret and eventually create. He recommended that:

*"The actor who wishes to perform Othello let us say, must not only have the rich nature from which to draw his wealth, but must also have the imagination to know how to put it before us. Therefore the ideal actor will be the man who possesses both a rich nature and a powerful brain."*

(Craig 1911)

Actors obviously carry a great deal of the responsibility for the creativity and receive the praise or hostility most directly of any of the people involved, as they are the ones who face the audience night after night. The relationship between the actors

and their audience being the crux of the creative process within theatre:

*"In art both the artist and the spectator actively cooperate, and the value of the work is dependent on this reciprocity. If in the theatre there is no interaction between stage and audience, the play is dead, bad or non-existent: the audience, like the customer, is always right."*

(Styan 1975)

Inherent within any definition of creativity is an assumption of 'the audience'. However, large or small, formal or informal, someone views the making of or the final product, and argues that in some way it has been creative. It may be the creators themselves who fulfil the role of audience, having made a conscious decision at the outset of their work that they were creating for themselves, or it may be the professionals the art critics or theatre critics, or it may be the general public. Whichever audience they choose this decision will inevitably influence the final product and how it is presented.

Within theatre the audience is part of the creative process because it is a live demonstration. Grotowski (1968) defines theatre as *"what takes place between spectator and actor."* A play depends upon the actors bringing life to script and using certain techniques and conventions to communicate this life to the



audience. Elam (1980) describes this as an agreement to participate in *"the performer-spectator transaction."*

The role of the actor is paramount to the success or otherwise of a performance, but as I mentioned earlier, theirs is not the sole responsibility for creativity. Often the director may manage their creativity, controlling the interpretation of the play, the staging and costume. The support technicians also make their contribution. Thus, rather than concentrate on the final product, I have chosen to study the creative process, the process of rehearsing, publicising and performing, concentrating on the participants interpretation of creativity and events around them in order to understand their behaviour.

Creativity within theatre is not, therefore, the sole preserve of any one individual, and can be better understood as a shared process. This is a notion which provides the original inspiration upon which the Today Theatre Company was established. As we shall see later, Today resented the typical control over the creative process by the director, which they argued stifled the creative potential of the actors, and formed their group on a collective basis as a reaction against this tendency.

The issues raised in this chapter also highlight some important concerns which provide the theoretical backdrop to this thesis. Running throughout the following pages is an attempt to break down the mystique of the creative process and, indeed, the

research process which I liken to everyday behaviour. Creativity is recognised as a shared process, and as a process of value for an individual in itself. The individual does not need to be creative at a recognised level by producing a "work of art", but can, I shall argue, be creative in their everyday interactions and experiences.

The issue of the audience raised in this chapter is crucial to the arguments in the following pages. I question the limited consideration of the role of the audience in the interactionist perspective and emphasise the importance of considering the individual interacting primarily as an audience to their own performance. Thus, I draw upon the notion of creativity as a process in order to argue that the individual can create for themselves at a metaphorical as well as at a tangible level.

This chapter, therefore, highlights certain themes which must be carried with the reader throughout this thesis, as it demonstrates some of my earlier thoughts on the research topic, some of which were to bear fruit at a later date when interpreting the fieldwork data. It therefore represents part of the theoretical framework upon which this thesis is built, outlining many of the insights taken with me to the research setting, upon which my interpretation of events was based. I freely admit that a different set of reading may have resulted in a quite different interpretation of events during and after the fieldwork encounter. As such this chapter is important as it illustrates part of the

social context in which the research was conducted, by providing the reader with access to my frame of reference taken with me to the fieldwork setting.

## CHAPTER TWO

### OUTLINING A PERSPECTIVE

*"That world through the window is a bare faced lie."*

(Pixner)

The research process involves the researcher in making a series of decisions which are rooted in the philosophy of knowledge. Their epistemology will influence their overall approach to research, its aims, how they set about collecting data and its presentation. In this chapter I shall make my epistemology apparent and look at the theoretical perspective which fits most closely with these views, whilst in Chapter Three I shall discuss how this affected my data collection and research methodology.

Epistemology is hardly seen as problematic within more positivistic traditions of research, where notions of scientific objectivity are taken for granted. By this I mean that researchers with a strictly empiricist approach make certain assumptions about knowledge which they fail to make apparent. There is an assumption of a subjective reality which corresponds to our value position of the world; and an objective reality which can be best understood by the 'expert' researcher. The objective reality exists whether it is part of our subjectivity or not. People are normally too caught up in their subjective

interpretation of events to consider or understand the objective reality of their class position or situation in which they find themselves.

There are, therefore, in the social sciences those 'who do' - the subjects of research, and those 'who understand' - the researchers. The former applying subjective interpretation to their behaviour and that of others, whilst the latter apply 'objective' standards, that is a value free interpretation of events. The objectivity of the researcher is supposedly ensured through the adoption of various scientific techniques. These include random sampling over a large population to ensure mix of ages, class backgrounds, education and experience. Questionnaires and interview schedules eliminate the possibility of bias, whilst the use of control subjects within laboratory conditions helps to maintain the analogy with the physical sciences.

What is overlooked by researchers within this paradigm is that knowledge itself is a social construct as is their interpretation of science. Stanley and Wise (1983) define a paradigm as:

*"....a theoretically derived world view which provides the categories and concepts through which and by which we construct and understand the world."*

(Stanley and Wise 1983)

The empiricist approach is such that scientific principles are highly valued rather than personal experience, but ironically this is as much a subjective interpretation of knowledge as is valuing personal experience. There is therefore an interpretive element in both approaches, although the qualitative social scientists recognize their subjectivity by stressing the interpretive nature of their approach, whereas quantitative social scientists disguise their subjectivity in laboratory techniques which supposedly overcome researcher bias. Roberts (1981) highlights an obvious bias in much of the traditional positivist research because she argues, most research has been sexist, generalising from one section of society, men, to create an explanation of the experience of both men and women.

Quantitative research methods which are traditionally used by positivistic researchers can also be criticised for failing to make a priori assumptions implicit in the research programme apparent. Some of the research outlined in the last chapter assumed that there were particular characteristics attributable to the creative person, and the research process was the means to set about verifying this. Research in this instance becomes a tool for a self-fulfilling prophecy and ironically involves erecting barriers to the discovery of knowledge whilst supposedly in its pursuit. I say this because questionnaires and interview schedules can only prove or disprove the researchers assumptions, and prevent them looking at anything else. They can ultimately lead to a situation where there is a danger that research can

simply prove or otherwise the researchers hypothesis devised at the outset of the research programme.

Another example of researcher bias is to be found in the work of Barron (1969). He uses a variety of scientific techniques to look at the creative potential of women. He tries to present an image of value free objective study, and yet in his opening preamble to the project, he trivialises his female subjects by describing them as:

*"....highly intelligent of course, and as a group they highly valued intellect and were aware of their own capacities. But most of them were good looking as well, and some were sweet, and no-one failed to be one of three, so as common sense would lead us to expect, they were all marriageable."*

(baron 1969)

Such an attitude towards his subjects is bound to influence his perception of their creative potential and the questions he asks when investigating it. There is an underlying assumption here which is found in his earlier work too, that creativity in women results from frustrated maternal desires, and will be lost once they produce children of their own.

*"The creative act is a kind of giving birth, and it is noteworthy that as historical fact intellectual creativity has*

*been conspicuously lacking in women, whose product are their children. At the risk of making too much of a linguistic parallel, it might be said that nature had literally arranged a division of labour. Men bring forth ideas, painting, literary and musical compositions, organizations of states, inventions, new material structures, and the like, while women bring forth the new generation."*

(Barron 1957)

In the last chapter I outlined the dangers inherent in the psychological trait tests of creativity which ignore the process of making, the role of support personnel and the harsh material realities of creating which help to perpetuate the myth of the talented genius. Researchers who initiated research with this image of the creative person in mind, and did not in any way challenge the assumptions behind this viewpoint, used techniques which reinforced a mystique under the auspices of objective research. My criticism is that they not only failed to make their own value position explicit, and that they were subjective creatures investigating a social construct, but that they also perpetrated an ideology of creativity under the guise of objective study.

Kogan in his introduction to Creativity and Sex Differences (1974) admits that:



*"....a writer who can unequivocally state that there are no systematic sex differences in level of creativity is in a singularly fortunate position. Given the value-laden character of the 'creativity' construct, it is with a sigh of relief that one solidly affirms the relative equality of the sexes in so significant a domain."*

(Kogan 1974)

Just as creativity is a social construct with a variety of different meanings for different individuals, so is knowledge. For some researchers it is assumed to be a fixed, factual phenomenon whilst for others it is an experiential process. Chester (1982) argues that *"experience leads to a refinement of theory which itself feeds back into experience and so on."* Knowledge thus becomes a dialectic between experience and theory which is a constant state of flux.

Research becomes more than producing a neatly packaged product complying to a myth of expertise, originality and objectivity. It involves the experiences of the researchers and the researched which are frozen for the purpose of reflection, whilst accepting that the situations out of which these ideas arose are always changing. This involves substituting what Oakley (1981) calls 'hygienic' research of the quantitative methodological tradition for a 'reflexive' research methodology.

Bias is accepted within a reflexive methodology because it focuses upon the experiences of the individuals in the research setting. Knowledge is seen as being rooted in experience which the researcher will reflect upon in a more deliberate way than we usually do in situations.

The researcher is not an omnipotent creature blessed with the sole access to an objective reality using a variety of mystical techniques in order to do so. Instead they adopt an approach which helps them to exaggerate the processes of everyday life. It is a process whereby the individual constantly 'steps out' of situations to reflect upon them rather than consistently acting within them as we tend to do in 'normal' everyday life. However, whilst the behaviour of researchers is in principle similar to that of everyday interaction, the heightening of the processes of interpretation is very different from the manner in which most people behave.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) describe typical everyday behaviour, arguing that whilst we have a 'better knowledge' of ourselves than we have of others, because of fuller access to our memories and experiences, we must still, in order to understand ourselves, reflect upon our actions. This means that we have to consciously stop acting and look at our experience to understand ourselves. The self, they argue, is not "*immediately presented to me.*" The other, however is "*ongoingly available*" in a way that is "*continuous and prereflective.*"

We have to stop acting, they argue, to reflect upon our behaviour, but have to constantly interpret others and attach a meaning to their behaviour in order to formulate a response. Thus we are in a situation whereby we are constantly interpreting other people's behaviour on the basis of shared meanings and attitudes brought by the self to the situation. This process is immediate and spontaneous rather than consciously carried out, whereas when we look at ourselves and dwell on our own behaviour it is much more of a conscious activity.

Berger and Luckmann are suggesting that during most situations we have to make very quick interpretations of others and modify our behaviour accordingly. It is a spontaneous rather than a deliberately manipulative process with the hazard of getting it wrong, hence the frequent situation in which we all find ourselves whereby we seem to be talking at cross purposes or have taken affront when we have simply misinterpreted a person's behaviour when no offence was intended. When it comes to looking at ourselves, however we spend far more time agonising over our behaviour, reenacting situations in our mind to decide how we could have performed better. There is a suggestion that we are the stars of our own performance and the supporting cast tend to be rather shadowy figures except when they shatter an image of ourselves.

Research in many ways turns this situation on its head. The researcher must reflect in depth upon the behaviour of the others

in a situation rather than concentrating upon their own performance. The researcher must render this immediate and spontaneous behaviour conscious, rather than make the hasty definitions of situations which characterise social life. The researcher is not 'ongoingly' interacting in situations, but is heightening the processes of behaviour for greater accuracy in defining situations and giving meaning to other peoples' behaviour.

The researcher whilst being concerned with the impression they give of themselves to the subjects of their research, will not be concerned primarily with this. Thus they adopt an everyday approach in that they interpret other peoples' behaviour and ascribe meaning to situations, but the aims and the process of research are very different. They are much more reflective, and less active, they are much more concerned with defining others and understanding the behaviour of others. They will be more concerned with the accuracy of any definition and cross check any impressions with behaviour in other situations. The researcher is concerned with the behaviour of others for its own sake rather than as a tool for modifying their own behaviour. As such it is in many ways the polar opposite of the behaviour described by Berger and Luckmann and yet is in essence very similar. It is not a mysterious process, simply a more accurate, in depth, reflective process than is required ordinarily.

On the basis of the premise that knowledge is a subjective process based on theory and experience, I chose my approach to this thesis. I adopted a qualitative approach concerned with collecting other peoples' experiences as the basis of my data. (For a fuller discussion of this process see Chapter Three). From the data I made an interpretation of the behaviour of members of the theatre group under study. My understanding of their behaviour in relation to theories of human behaviour provide the cornerstones of this work.

The theoretical perspective which best fits this view of knowledge and research methodology is found in the symbolic interactionist literature. I used symbolic interactionism to help me gain some valuable insights into their behaviour, but found it inadequate as a perspective to fully explain their actions. In the following pages I shall outline the basic concepts of symbolic interactionism and touch upon some of its weaknesses, and expand on these in later chapters. Briefly, however, I found it too concerned with the micro situation, when social and historical factors could explain behaviour more accurately than simply concentrating on interaction within a situation. Behaviour I shall argue must be seen as a dialectic between experiences within situations and socio-structural factors which constrain behaviour within them.

The basic premise of symbolic interactionism is outlined by Mangham (1978), where he argues that:

*"Human beings are defined as actors, the initiators of action, and not simply as those acted upon, the responders. They are defined as organisms with selves which construct, direct and monitor behaviour."*

(Mangham 1978)

People are able to define situations and act accordingly rather than passively respond to economic or structural forces. They can control their own behaviour and their own lives rather than giving up responsibility for themselves to some outside predeterminate force, whether it be the organisation within which they work, or society as a whole.

Within symbolic interactionism people are not seen as passive respondents to a social structure which lies beyond their control. There is a rejection of 'determinism' which sees people as mere pawns being swept along with the inevitable forces of society, their lives being formed for them by various social structures. Nothing is seen as inevitable, nor unchangeable, people can and do exert an influence over their lives.

*"The process of self-interaction puts the human being against his world instead of merely in it, requires him to meet and handle his world through a defining process instead of merely responding to it and forces him to construct his action instead of merely releasing it."*

(Blumer 1965)

Symbolic interactionism also challenges the humanist perspective arguing that behaviour is more than a response to individual whims or needs. This approach they argue is too individualistic, denying *"the dialectical interplay between the self and others,"* (Mangham 1978). For the symbolic interactionist, behaviour involves more than individual choices for there are some constraints imposed upon us by the expectations of others within society. Thus:

*"The behaviour of men and women is 'caused' not so much by forces within themselves (instincts, drives, needs, etc.) or by external forces impinging upon them (social forces etc.), but what lies in between, a reflexive and socially derived interpretation of the internal and external stimuli that are present."*

(Meltzer, Petra and Reynolds 1975)

### Symbolic Interactionism

Central to the symbolic interactionists is the concept of the self. This is extremely important as it contains the notion that human beings can be objects to themselves, can reflect upon themselves and can be objects of their own experience. The self, argues Lauer and Handel (1983), is a dialectical process between the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'I' is the unpredictable subjective part of the self; the 'Me' is the internalised attitudes of the community, the objective part of the self.

Lauer and Handel (1983) argue that the self is a dialectical process, it is a mediation between one's impulses and the expectations of the social environment. Conduct, they argue, does not occur in a vacuum, but in specific situations and is a result of individual desires and internalised values in response to the situation. Hewitt (1976) suggests that situations are usually well known and present us with familiar acts and objects which are termed "*the definition of the situation.*" People act in relation to their definition of the situation, observing their own and others' behaviour, and adjusting subsequent behaviour on this basis.

Berger and Luckmann (1966:72) refer to a "*typification of habitualised actions.*" By this they mean that an actor watches the others' performance and attributes motives to them. They will see this action recur and typify the motives as recurrent. The actor will interpret the others' behaviour and define the situation in order to alter their own behaviour accordingly and adopt the required role. In order to do this the actor must be able to make the 'I' the object of their thoughts and ask "*what does the other expect of me?*"

The second characteristic of the self is that it is reflexive. This means that the individual can be an object to themselves and can observe, evaluate and direct their own behaviour. Mead (1934) explains the self as an organisation of shared attitudes. Our actions are based in our cognition of a situation rather than mere



reflex or habit. Lauer and Handel, however, stress that this is a process and that the attitudes will constantly change. The self involves set of attitudes that are raised in both the individual and in others who compose the social setting.

It follows that reality, as for Hewitt (1976) and other symbolic interactionists, is a matter of definition rather than objective fact. The definition of the situation which, *"is an active process of reality construction in which people are the authors of their own experiences and of the realities they inhabit,"* is a crucial concept for, *"in such terms roles are taken, objects indicated and conduct formed."* People control their lives by actively giving it meaning and responding accordingly:

*"If a single image dominates the interactionist view of human conduct, it is that people actively and creatively engage their environment in the course of meeting their needs. Human conduct is not viewed as passively responsive to external conditions over which the organism has no control, but as formed consciously and in interaction with others as the world is met, given meaning and acted on."*

(Hewitt 1976)

The cornerstone of symbolic interactionism is that reality is a social construction with a variety of possible responses

dependent upon the meaning given to it. Behaviour can therefore, be best understood by looking at the meaning given to actions.

*"....social actions must be understood in terms of the meanings particular social actors attach to their social world rather than as a product of an objectively defined set of conditions."*

(Mangham 1978)

I feel that there are three basic weaknesses in the interactionist perspective. Firstly, there is a tendency to overlook the purpose of interaction, why we modify our actions and present desirable images of self. It is assumed that modification is a result of the 'Me' interpreting the situation and expectations of others and thus constraining the more spontaneous 'I'. Modification essentially is a response to an external other which will sanction our behaviour and reinforce the self which is a social construct. I feel that this view neglects the creative potential of the individual to create situations for themselves primarily, rather than for others, and ignores the fact that the individual can be an audience to their own performance and create for themselves.

Secondly it assumes an equality of opportunity between interactants within a situation. Two individuals rarely have, or at least rarely perceive that they have, the same power to bring the definition they most desire to a situation. There are various structural constraints such as organisational hierarchies, income

and status differences, employee/employer relationships, which would make it extremely difficult for the less powerful interactant to interpret, and behave on the basis of this interpretation with the same equality as the more powerful . In theory, or in their imagination, they can do this, but in practice within the situation itself usually will not.

Thirdly, there is a danger within interactionism to exaggerate the conscious manipulation behind interaction. Mead (1934) recognises that the I/Me negotiations are more to do with theoretical models than ways of behaving, but this is, however, a notion which tends to be overlooked, and thus engenders a view of behaviour as being more deliberate than may often be the case, as exemplified in Goffman's Presentation of Self (1959). I believe that behaviour is more often spontaneous than preplanned, and accounts of actions frequently reflect more of a post-facto rationalisation than an account of predetermined actions.

As a result of these three weaknesses there is a tendency for interactionism to become descriptive rather than analytic. It may rest on an isolated instance of interaction rather than the process of behaving in a wider social context. People do not exist in a social vacuum, they bring past histories and expectations to an event and will be concerned about the future implications of their actions. If you shut your eyes for one moment and try to concentrate on your body, you will see that your mind in fact tends to focus on the past and the future rather than

the present. Our actions have implications for the future, and our behaviour is shaped by our past and so a theory which dwells in the present as a series of episodes ignores many of the essential qualities of human behaviour. Hence my instructions to the reader to heed the subtext, the unspoken level of communication, which may be a vital part of understanding events completely overlooked by interactionists, which links the past and future to present performance.

I argued in Chapter One that behind any definition of creativity was an assumption of the audience. The creators' perception of their audience and of their role in the creative process will in fact influence this process as well as its end product. The creators may decide that they themselves will be the audience to their work, and this initial decision will influence their attitude throughout the creative process.

Likewise with interaction, the performer in any interactive situation, must decide who they are performing for, who constitutes their audience. They may be performing for themselves, to convince themselves of something: for example, that they really are a popular or a happy person, or for their parents, friends, 'superiors', or the general public. I feel that just as the decision over the audience is crucial to the presentation of a creative piece of work, so it is for the performers within an interactive situation. The actors must decide who they are playing for, and this decision will influence their behaviour as

much as previous experience and ideas brought with them to a situation.

The actor will also be concerned with the evaluation given to their performance by others. They may want to convince an interviewer that they are a keen and conscientious worker in order to get a job. For actors on the stage there are, for example, three types of audience: the ordinary theatre goer, theatre critics and fellow actors. These three groups all evaluate the performance, but the actors will be more concerned with the opinions of one group rather than another. Similarly actors within an interactive situation will be more concerned with the perception of their behaviour by certain members of the audience than by others.

Thus the actor will decide who they are performing for, and adjust their behaviour accordingly. They may be performing for themselves to 'listen to the sound of their own voice' and convince themselves that they are a knowledgeable or an affable person. The attention of others during idle discourse thus provides the reward for continuing a performance, just like the clapping at the end of a scene on stage.

I think it is important to distinguish between a primary and a secondary audience within a situation. The primary audience consisting of the most significant others to whom a performance is addressed. As I point out later in the thesis, the primary

audience for the Today Theatre Group was themselves. The *raison d'être* of the group was the group, rather than the paying audience, and this not only affected their style of performance but their relationships with one another too. The secondary audience is of less importance, they are the shadowy figures present during an event but of no real consequence to the main performers or the plot.

The concept of a primary and secondary audience differs from Mead's (1934) generalised and specific other in that the primary audience may be the individual themselves, and the audience for whom they appear to be performing the secondary audience. It is a notion which rests upon the assumption that the individual is a creative performer who creates a performance of value in itself for themselves rather than as a process subject to external modification. This is not to deny the moderating roles of others on occasion, or even that within the secondary audience some may be more important than others. Neither does it deny that a performance may be for an external audience alone, it is simply to add another layer to the notion of audience within any interaction.

If reality is a social construction rather than an objective fact, it is extremely important that others share this construction. Not everyone needs to share the same perception of a situation, but the primary audience must agree to the definition of the situation in order for interaction to continue. Berger and

Luckmann (1966) argue that every viable society must develop procedures of reality maintenance to maintain a symmetry between objective and subjective reality. This largely happens through routines which are, they argue, the essence of institutionalisation. Norms must be developed within small groups of people, which are themselves for the duration of the situation at least, a small viable society. Behaviour will be aimed partly at maintaining this reality.

The individual is not entirely free to construct their own reality, for they are also concerned with social definitions of behaviour. They see themselves in terms of social relationships, for example, sister, mother, employee as well as having socially desirable personal attributes, for example, kindness and generosity, which they seek to maintain before others. There is a social construction of reality which confines our behaviour, that is to say we know certain conventions and norms of behaviour which will guide our performance in situations. For instance, there are certain structures such as hierarchies within organisations which shape and influence our behaviour. Most candidates at a job interview will behave in fairly similar ways, and employees adopt a certain amount of deference when talking to their employer.

Individuals are free to interpret these social structures within certain parameters, but to step outside the confines of acceptable behaviour will result in dismissal or reprimands which could have serious consequences for them. Thus we can choose to

go to the office without wearing a tie, but cannot wear shorts in summer as this is seen as too casual and not befitting the company image. We can interpret this norm as sensible or stupid but cannot ignore it. Sartre (1969) suggested that we were condemned to freedom. He argued that we were free to choose, but were not always free to choose our choice. We can choose how we define a situation but are not free to always behave as we like without eliciting disapproval from others.

We further constrain our behaviour by choosing an audience for our performance. Once that audience has been selected we then seek their approval and will behave accordingly. This may mean that we can upset the expectations of other people in the situation in order to impress the individuals we have selected as a primary audience to our performance. At a party someone may behave outrageously to impress another guest whilst upsetting the host and hostess who had wanted a quiet cocktail party. They may have known the social construction of the event but interpreted their friend's desire for unconventional behaviour, and risk never being invited to a party again to impress this one person.

Thus, whilst there are constraints upon behaviour brought about through our acceptance of a socially constructed reality which affects and is affected by our individual interpretation of situations, we are free to choose our audience and therefore which social reality to maintain. Workers in a factory may thus define their position as being exploited and underpaid and consequently



challenge management definitions of a situation and go on strike. They may make jokes about various managers to one another, but when faced individually with 'the boss' may be less outspoken in order to keep their job.

Interpretation of a situation may alter with experience. Bate and Mangham (1981) discovered that employees who participated in a worker participation scheme felt much more favourably about it as a working style, than employees who had simply been questioned about such schemes by other researchers, when they had no personal experience of them. Experience may then alter one's consciousness or interpretation of events and peoples' behaviour. However, individuals may bring their political consciousness to bear on a situation as part of their personal frame of reference within which they define situations. In such an instance they may try to create an idealized reality for themselves, to behave as they think they should. They may therefore try to construct a social reality between them, in which they attempt to maintain their ideals. A whole series of idealistic, egalitarian organisations such as agit-prop theatre groups, cooperatives and whole food collectives were formed in the 1960's on this basis. They were trying to present an alternative to society and were consequently concerned to maintain this ideal in their interaction.

Whereas it is generally the case that we take our audience for granted and do not make a conscious choice as to who our audience may be, idealistic groups such as those mentioned above tend, on

the contrary, to be fully aware of their audience. The importance of this to symbolic interactionists is that the taken-for-granted audience implicit in behaviour on occasion can become explicit as with impression management. A deliberate presentation of an ideal self is then performed for a recognised audience. For example, mainstream society or other members of the collective. However, and of more importance to our discussion in this thesis, is our ability to perform for ourselves as an audience for our own ideal of self. I shall argue that we can also perform for ourself to convince ourselves of an ideal and that this constitutes the creative process of interaction, referred to earlier in which we can create fictions for ourselves through our interactions with others.

Lauer and Handel (1983) point out that the notion of self as process contained within symbolic interactionism acknowledges the mediating influences of one's impulses and the expectations of social environment. They argue that:

*"....one takes into account both the way in which one's impulses accord with community attitudes - the norms and values that one has internalized or at least recognises - and also the meanings that emerge in a specific situation of interaction."*

(Lauer and Handel 1983)

I am arguing that interaction can be more creative than this account suggests, and that individuals not only take social constructions into account, but may create realities between themselves based on their ideas and experiences, and try to maintain these created realities for themselves. Convincing their audience of this construction is then an essential part of any interaction. The secondary audience are of less importance as they are simply onlookers to the situation rather than participants. Thus a punk may be more concerned with the impression they make on fellow punks in town than on the regular shoppers who may stop and stare at them.

We can create and maintain realities for ourselves in order to convince ourselves rather than others that something we would like to see happening is what we are in fact doing. We are then implicitly choosing ourselves as the primary audience to an interaction and the secondary audience may be an unwitting part of our fiction, or shadowy figures who witness what we are doing without realising the fiction and accepting the behaviour at surface level. Because of this the notion of the subtext is essential to interactionists as a key to discovering the hidden meaning in a performance through interpreting observations of behaviour and the unspoken implications within actions.

The second major problem with the symbolic interactionist perspective is the treatment of the concept of power. I have already suggested that individuals are not as free to choose their

behaviour within a situation as symbolic interactionism would suggest. I have argued that one's position in a hierarchy, and one's choice of an audience for an interaction will constrain behaviour within a situation. By locating an individual in a social context the tacit power inherent within a situation becomes more explicit.

Power is not a concept which is completely overlooked by the interactionists but as I feel, treated in too simplistic a fashion. Lauer and Handel (1983) for example, recognise that those in higher positions in an organisation have less reason to accurately take the role of others than those in lower positions. They cite an example of a young black who drops his educated voice and adopts the manner of a plantation Negro when faced with white Southern American police.

They also point to power difference in the case of non-verbal gestures such as patting someone on the head during conversation. The powerful can use particular symbols to elicit the desired behaviour from others and can also determine which symbols are legitimate. They give the example of defining the poor as scroungers, if this is accepted then there is no need for the rich to alleviate the sufferings of the poor.

One of the weaknesses of Lauer and Handel's approach is that they simply accept power as a given reality for some situations, and fail to consider either the processes whereby the particular

individuals gain or maintain their power. They overlook the tacit process of power inherent within a situation whereby the powerless accept the dominant definitions of the powerful regardless of the intentions of this latter group. Power need not simply refer to an intentional power 'over' another but can arise out of the meanings given to a situation. It is a concept which can be so well illustrated by interactionism, and yet, I feel, is so often overlooked.

By focusing on the micro-situation and ignoring the mediating effects of social context upon an interaction, interactionism is in danger of ignoring the pervasive process of power whereby meanings are given to individuals. At best interactionist treatment of power is descriptive rather than analytic. It is accepted that there are differences in power and the effect this has on the interactive episode is considered, but the process whereby power is maintained or challenged is ignored. It is a negotiated phenomenon, subject to individuals' interpretations of themselves and others, and yet, I feel rather ironically, is treated almost as a structural constraint within a situation.

The concept of power as a process is highlighted by studying the collective organisation. Here there are supposedly no mechanisms for creating and maintaining a power situation in the organisational structure. Individuals are all of equal status and importance in the organisation. Yet, power can be vested in the

hands of a few dominant individuals, whether they want it or not, by the definitions given to the collective by other members of the organisation. If they do not see collectivism as the opportunity to participate equally in the decision making processes, those who do this may become powerful almost by default. They may not intend to dominate the group, but discover themselves defined into this role, and choose not to alter it. Likewise other members of an organisation may resent the power of the dominant individual but choose to accept the situation because it appears the most expedient alternative open to them. Thus power may not result out of the social structure or indeed from any conspiracy theory on the part of the powerful, but may result from a series of tacit negotiations between a group. It may thus result from unconscious processes depending upon the meanings individuals give to their own and others' actions, and as an 'unintentional' phenomenon is ripe for an interactionist perspective.

My third criticism of this perspective is that running throughout interactionism, and theories of impression management in particular (as outlined by Goffman), is an exaggeration of the conscious manipulation of behaviour. Individuals do not perform as rationally or deliberately as this approach suggests. We make many of our actions on the basis of either routine or because they simply "feel good" at the time; or else they may be a spontaneous reaction to a situation which has not been considered at all.

Collins (1981) argues that we do not constantly define situations, but behave on the assumption of normalcy and routine. We do not carry cognitive maps of the social structure or even of a particular organisation, instead he argues we:

*"Negotiate a fairly limited routine in a few physical places and with the particular people usually encountered there. We do not constantly manage an impression of ourselves or concern ourselves with reflecting upon the behaviour of others."*

(Collins 1981)

Behaviour is therefore seen implicitly throughout this thesis as spontaneous action located in a social context. The individual has a framework of past experiences of their own actions, and of those of others; which can be drawn upon to give meaning to our event; and which may even be used as the basis of a performance for themselves. There is a creative potential within every individual to give meanings to an event and to perform within an event for themselves as the audience of their behaviour. This may be less a reflection of a conscious rational approach to interaction than an unconscious spontaneous performance because it is satisfying at a particular moment.

Because an individual interacts with others and because actions have implications in themselves and for others, there is an inherent power negotiation within all interactions, however

implicit these may be. The actors may be fed images of themselves as is seen with sexist stereotypes of women and the female experience which renders many women powerless: hence the inadequacy of focusing on the micro-situation alone. We need to consider the process whereby definitions are given to a situation and the actors fed definitions of themselves. This involves a consideration of the socio-historical context underlying any performance and a consideration of the unspoken meaning implicit within an event.

If one considers life as a theatre then a text usually contains some references to the actor's background even if only in the stage directions and the subtext. We must therefore interpret our own behaviour and that of others creatively, and consider the implications of meanings underlying an event rather than accept the text of a performance alone. It is not enough simply to catch a glimpse backstage, or even of the rehearsals of an actor's performance. We must interpret the meanings implicit within the actor's performance itself, and consider the subtext of an event to gain a fuller understanding of human behaviour.

Interactionism provides essential tools for doing just this, by suggesting that behaviour is a process, and an active, rather than a passive, performance. But it is a theory which, I feel, can be developed and added to, as I reveal in the latter section of this thesis, where I develop the concept of a 'fictional reality', as a



separate layer of reality which emanates from the individual's social construction of reality.

SECTION TWO

**THE PERFORMANCE**

In this section I shall outline the research performance as it occurred during the fieldwork setting. This performance constituted the relationship between myself - the researcher - and the Today Theatre Company - the researched. Whilst there were many acts within this performance, for example, the performance of the collective in the rehearsal situation, or on stage, and the small group negotiations in private, it was the performance of Today before the researcher which provides basis for this thesis.

In this section, therefore, I outline my experience of studying their behaviour and demonstrate how I collected the material on which my theoretical constructions are built. I consider this experience with some of the methodological approaches outlined for researchers, and argue that most of these present an 'ideal type' rather than a realistic account of the research process. I argue that research is not only a subjective interpretive process, but that the researcher's experience constitutes a valid source of data in addition to the collection of observations and interviews.

I argue that research is not a mysterious process whereby the researcher gains access to an objective reality unknown to the researched. I see it instead, as an interpretive process akin to everyday interaction, only in a more reflexive heightened way. The researcher is less participative and more reflexive because their aims are distinct from the researched. Indeed they are hoping to collect data for the purpose of interpretation to

present before a reader. They, like actors, must make an interpretation of events as they unfold in the text of the actors' accounts, gained during interviews and through observations. They must also consider the meaning implicit in their relationship with the researched and in the unspoken subtext of events to make a creative interpretation of the performance for the reader. Thus it is I compare the research process to theatre with the researcher constituting actor, audience and critic of the performance.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### JUST BEING AN ORDINARY PERSON

*"Interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is; an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets."*

(Oakley 1981)

I argued in the preceeding chapters that understanding behaviour started with looking at the meaning given to actions by actors within a social situation. In this chapter therefore, I should like to discuss how I set about collecting and interpreting the meanings given to their actions by the Today Theatre Company: and, secondly, how I have interpreted research within the social situation of field work. This second point is most important because many methodologists present an ideal type model of the research process which leaves out the main protagonists, the researchers and the researched, as they interact with one another, as well as their process of interaction which is valuable data in itself. I shall discuss how I interpreted their interpretation of their behaviour, and the problems I faced in doing this.

First of all I should like to explain what I mean by an 'ideal type' model of research methodology. I use the concept in the Weberian sense to denote a theoretical construct rather than

something which actually exists, or in this case, to present a model of how research should be done as if it is or can be done in this way, rather than present the process of research as experienced by researchers themselves. There is an academic fiction (a term which I shall explore in greater detail later) of 'clinical research' methodology which helps to maintain the mystique and status of their work by social scientists trying to emulate what are seen as the techniques employed in the physical sciences. This tends to reinforce belief in a 'scientific paradigm' in which research is presented as an ordered preplanned activity using objective criteria to prove or reject hypotheses. This is an approach which is assumed to happen in the quantitative methodological studies, and spills over, I believe, into qualitative processes.

There are several problems inherent in this approach to social science. Firstly it forces a false dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative techniques with researchers desperately trying to maintain a fiction of the research process which enables them to fit their accounts of the research process into one polar extreme or another. The qualitative researchers may not admit to many small cyclical hypotheses testing solutions within their overall grounded approach; or the quantitative researcher to the importance of their more open questions and digressions during interviews. As soon as an individual researcher tries to force their accounts to fit a theoretical model, rather than use models as a simplification of a complex process, there is a danger of their

concealing elements of their experience which contain a wealth of important data. The problems faced by the researcher, for example, may tell more about the subjects under study than the information collected as data when used in the narrowest sense of the word. Of course, this may not always be the case but it is an idea certainly worth bearing in mind when presenting methodology.

In addition to this, a further drawback in (perhaps unconsciously) trying to fit the research process into a methodological convention is that interplay between the researcher and the researched mybe written out of the explanation of events. Focus can be placed on the image of ordered activity which reflects well on the planning capabilities of the researchers who will explain how they sensitised themselves to their field works subjects whilst balancing the desire to gain an understanding with the ability to reflect upon events. Thus the reader never really gains access to this process, because it is presented in terms of academic arguments which loses the essence of the people involved.

I prefer to see the research process as being like theatre. The researcher watches the various performances of the actors involved, and keenly studies their interpretation of events whilst maintaining the right to add their own interpretation of events. More importantly, however, they must then present their own theatre for the readers to interpret as wish, and must, therefore, convey the interplay of the various realities involved. To illustrate this point I should like to draw upon an example from

literature and ask the reader to consider the different approaches between John Fowles maintaining his right to play with realities in The French Lieutenant's Woman and presenting the reader with a choice of endings, thus reminding them of his creative role and Enid Blyton, starting with 'once upon a time', taking us along a moral avenue to where they predictably 'lived happy ever after'.

In order to do this I should like to present some of the issues pertinent to methodology implicit in what I have just said, and present examples of some of the aforementioned ideal types. I would then like to give my account of research as I experienced it at the time. It is in some ways quite naïve and this I feel was done due to the fact that I was so caught up in the doing of research and considering the methodological implications of my experience, which did not fit what I read, that I did not always see the theoretical implications of what was happening. This took place two years later when, in the process of writing up and reconsidering events and their relationship to various theories I had come across, I could reflect upon events from a different perspective, seeing implications in behaviour in which I was too absorbed at the time. There is, thus, a difficulty in writing a methodology chapter because there are various time leaps involved between the reality of doing field work and the reality of writing up, presented as one story.

I would like to begin this story with a discussion of Simmel whose essay on 'The Stranger' (1950) raises many of the issues



pertinent to a discussion of methodology. Simmel refers to the advantageous position of the outsider to a group or organisation when trying to understand behaviour because they are someone who:

*"Is not radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group, and therefore approaches them with the specific attitudes of objectivity." This objectivity is defined as freedom where "the individual is bound by no commitments which could prejudice his perception, understanding and evaluation of the giver."*

(Simmel 1950)

He argues that by being an outsider, the stranger can understand behaviour far better than the members within the group because they do not take any events for granted, and have no vested interest in the outcome of events. They can, therefore, he argues, view behaviour with greater clarity and impartiality.

Simmel (1950) suggests that the researcher has a clarity of observation that members of a group, family, organisation or society cannot have of themselves. When we travel abroad, for example, we may view the accepted customs of other societies questioningly, and look for some inherent meaning which may be overlooked by the indigenous population. The visitor, for example, may see some things which the insiders will miss through taking their actions for granted. Neither will they see those events quite as members of the particular group or society would,

because having no experience of their particular history and culture, they lack the very taken-for-grantedness of the event. They will, thus, have a different, rather than a better or worse, understanding of events.

Clarity, is something which I feel stems more from the individual's reflective processes than from their separateness. By their very role of being a researcher concentrating upon the implications of behaviour rather than their own performance as an actor, they gain insights which the casual outsider may not make simply by being a stranger. One can concentrate on getting snapshots of the family around the pool, and the local tavernas and historical monuments without ever thinking of the meaning behind the customs and costumes which provide interesting backdrops for the tourists to be shown back home. The researcher must be less concerned with how they might appear (except of course to the subjects of their study before whom their presentation of self is very important), and focus on the behaviour and the rituals of the group they are studying.

The ethnographic paradigm as described by Reeves-Sanday (1979) is a deliberate attempt by researchers to overcome the problems of the outsider who misses valuable access to information by not being a member of the group. She recommends that the researcher try to become part of the group being studied in order to empathise with the particular group under observation. Empathy rather than detachment, for Reeves-Sanday, is the key to

understanding. She describes ethnography as the process whereby the researcher becomes part of the situation being studied in order to feel what it is like for the people in that situation. For her, this raises the problem of objectivity as she refers to a 'disorientation' that arises when one tries to identify with, at the same time as remaining distant from, the subjects being studied.

I would like to look at the issue of objectivity later, and remain with the concept of 'The Stranger' for the moment. There appear to be two contrasting arguments here: the first emphasises the value of the researcher as an outsider who has no vested interest in the behaviour but tries to make objective analyses of the situation. The second stresses the inherent disadvantage of the outsider who must compensate for this by trying to gain an empathetic understanding of events without losing sight of their objectivity. Both theoretical positions make a number of implicit assumptions in these statements, namely that the lack of a vested interest is a useful attribute, that objectivity is possible and desirable as is empathy. I would like to suggest that the researcher make a subjective interpretation of events based on their own historical, cultural and personal experiences brought to the research setting with them. Their interpretation of events will, therefore, differ from that of the actors involved as will the interpretation of the various actors. They will have access to an overview of some situations, be totally excluded from others, will question some taken-for-granted behaviour, but will

miss the direct experience of the actors because what they are primarily doing is research, and not participating in the particular organisation or group.

This leads me onto Simmel's second point that the lack of vested interest is advantageous because it might prejudice the researcher's understanding. In fact I think that this might be more damaging than advantageous to the researcher, because if their subjects see this lack of commitment to the same goals, they may perceive the researcher as someone potentially quite threatening. This may possibly result in the subjects under investigation seeking to give the researcher a favourable impression of themselves, or of their organisation, or else they may simply deny the researcher access to the organisation, as was so often my experience when attempting to set up my own fieldwork.

In some cases access to an organisation may be granted by the employers with the consequence that the researcher is more or less imposed on the other members of the organisation, who may view them with suspicion. In an industry threatened by redundancy, for example, employees may perceive any researcher, whatever their purpose for being there, as someone concerned with cutting jobs. They will take great care to present an image of themselves as overworked employees, vital members to the organisation, rather than allow the researcher access to their normal working practices and in-house jokes about one another's work performance, which

would be necessary if the researcher wanted an empathetic understanding of their work life.

The researcher may, in fact, be consciously or even unconsciously 'managed' by the group in question which, perceiving an audience to their performance, will start to do just that, perform for the researcher and give them a deliberately chosen reality. Even more threatening is the potential of the researcher to expose an interpretation of reality desired by the actors who then have to choose whether to bring the researcher into their definition or exclude them totally. As I shall demonstrate later (see Chapter Six) in my experience this choice was not so straightforward because, whilst the actors created their own reality, it was maintained by the unconscious adoption of fictions, of which I became a part by not revealing it as such whilst knowing I was not a part of their conscious fiction, that is, of the reality created for themselves.

I was, thus, used as an integral part of their fiction without knowing it, but was seen as potentially threatening because I could expose it, and so had to be kept outside of the fiction. They could not risk checking out how I would view the fiction because it was not something which could be openly admitted to themselves. At the time I was more concerned with the distinction between the separate aims of the group rehearsing and performing and myself getting some fieldwork data. I thus felt we would inevitably interpret situations differently because of our

differing backgrounds and aims. I felt that empathy was not possible because I was always an audience to their performance, not realising at the time that I was in fact caught up in their show.

The notion of the researcher as an audience is quite important because the group may alter their behaviour on the basis of how important an audience the researcher is. The researcher may be the sole audience for a performance which will 'upset' the 'normal' patterns of behaviour as in the redundancy example. Alternatively they may only be part of an audience and part of the performance of the actors under study. Doctors, for example, may want to convince not only the researcher but also the receptionists, nurses and health visitors that they are extremely busy members of the community, worthy of their high status and pay. The researcher will then face various techniques such as being kept waiting, having appointments cancelled or cut short by the doctors to enable them to maintain their professional mystique before all these audiences. The researcher, therefore, becomes part of the doctor's fiction and also an audience to it.

They are then left with a choice of playing along with the fiction or exposing it, or possibly of giving no weight to their own experience, and accepting that they have been kept waiting because the doctor is busy. Thus, research involves researchers in making choices with implications for their methodology, for their theoretical perspective and, most importantly, for the

future of the group under study. I believe if they are in a position of trust, having been allowed to enter a group or organisation, that the insights they gain may potentially give them a power which they must not abuse. And so, whilst retaining an interpretive choice, the researcher must restrict their actions within the group and not misuse their potentially powerful position. However, having said this, it was a power that I only realised several months later - after my involvement with the group - and for a long time felt extremely powerless due to our separate aims because they had the control over access to my Ph. D. data. Thus a situation occurs whereby there is a development from the researcher being in quite a powerless position, with ambivalent roles one in which they may become threatening to the subjects of their study.

Researchers have in the past been concerned about the 'researcher-effect' on their fieldwork. Festinger (1956) advocates a 'fly on the wall' technique which minimalises research involvement during participant observation so as not to disturb events. However, if the researcher is not going to covertly penetrate an organisation, it is not a part of their work which must be acknowledged. For example, whilst I did not worry about my presence affecting the group's behaviour in a direct way, I did expect to witness some press bulletins issued for my benefit alone but was far more concerned about interpreting contradictory statements, and gaining access to the individual's interpretation

of reality rather than what they presented for me or themselves because it simply sounded 'good'.

I collected a variety of contradictory statements which were theoretically as well as methodologically interesting. At a theoretical level I had to decide whether these contradictions constituted valuable data reflecting an attempt to manage contradictions between the group's goals and their own experiences, or whether they were misinterpretations of events on my side or simply accounts aimed at me as a researcher. Thus, I had to be confident that there was a sound basis for my interpretation of their behaviour.

Because I was concerned with subjective interpretations of events, there were inevitably going to be differences between individuals within the group, and between the group and myself. However, when there were contradictory accounts from the individuals themselves throughout the group, I had to question the theoretical implications of this. I took pains to look beyond superficial impressions of accounts and tried to look at the tacit processes and undercurrents of behaviour within the group. I adopted a range of tactics to suit the varying situations, pretending to be researching them at times whilst openly noting behaviour at others, to try and gain a variety of observations from which I could make my own interpretation of events.



I chose to study one group in depth to enable me to build up as close a relationship as possible with the group members, and to enable me to gain a feel for moods as well as an understanding of events. Thus, I was able to draw my own interpretation of their behaviour based not only on what was said but also on what I thought was happening. I was, therefore, concerned with collecting their accounts of events as data in themselves, and with making my own interpretation of events as they unfolded before me. Like the audience in the theatre, I reserved the right to make my own interpretation of what was said and indeed what was not.

In order to collect adequate data, I had to try and observe the group in as many settings as possible and to be extremely flexible with regard to the requirements of the situation, putting away the trappings of a researcher when I felt the situation required. I had to be extremely sensitive to their moods and assess the underlying message of an action through intonation, non-verbal gestures and possibly earlier or later conversations. Gaining their trust was an essential part of this process, and this reflects another disadvantage of the outsider's position because they are not trusted and, therefore, can miss valuable insights.

Simmel (1950) also refers to the 'objectivity' of the researcher. This is a term which I believe quite unnecessarily haunts research methodology. Reeves-Sanday (1979) refers to the

disorientation caused by identifying with and, at the same time, distancing oneself from what is being studied. Bryson and Thompson (1978) refer to the problems of contradictory demands - if one is observing well, one is not participating enough. Whilst Mamack (1978) recommends that the researcher should:

*"....take an active part in the way of life of the people you are studying while being sufficiently detached so as not to lose sight of your original scientific objectives."*

(Mamack 1978)

I think that the above writers are all needlessly concerned with an illusion of objective research because they are concerned with the meanings given to events by actors, and to interpreting these meanings: both of which can only be subjective processes because the meanings and the language used to convey them only have value in a subjective context. I also feel that there is less danger of the researcher losing sight of their objectives than they suggest because they have a different motivation for being part of the situation, and this different set of expectations and past experiences will not only influence how they interpret an incident but will also influence the meaning it has for them as scientists. For example, a tense situation may be perceived a threat to the group's existence for the group, and may be seen as threatening to the researcher's goal of collecting data and it would be naïve to pretend otherwise. Thus, I do not think that the researcher will ever completely empathise with a group

because their aims are distinct and their different aims will be part of the researcher's framework during fieldwork.

Researchers cannot be entirely objective because they bring ideas and opinions to a research setting, they will react, have feelings, opinions and emotions, all of which affect their subjective interpretation of events: and for this reason I feel it is better to talk of a sensitive detachment rather than empathy or objectivity. The researcher will be less active and more reflexive than the members of the group under study, sensitive to the accuracy of their interpretation of events, not simply reaching to them, but with an almost inevitable, rather than acquired detachment, for all the reasons I have previously mentioned.

The notion of the objective researcher, as I stated earlier, reflects a fiction of social science trying to ascribe to a false notion of natural scientific techniques, ignoring the apriori assumptions, the reading and experiences of the researcher. Research is not conducted in a vacuum. Researchers do not enter a little bubble where they do research freed from previous experiences and ideas. As a researcher myself, I took various interests, ideas and opinions with me to the research setting, as did the actors involved, and interpreted their behaviour on the basis of what I saw and what I read as well as what I had already experienced in life outside of the research setting. For this reason too I feel that the Grounded Theory of Glaser and Strauss

(1967) can only be seen as an ideal type rather than a viable methodology because, even where they acknowledge the validity of subjective interpretation, it is quite erroneous to assume that researchers can ground their theories in the data alone. This can be a springboard and, indeed, provide the basis for most of the thesis but let us not forget the human element which brings in the outside world to the research setting. Research is better seen as a dialectic between external experiences, namely reading and past experiences, and internal experiences - collecting the data, analysing and reflecting upon these experiences in a sensitive manner. It is the dialectic of praxis of theory and action. The researcher must be more reflexive and more concerned with the accuracy than the individual in ordinary life but cannot deny the influence of ideas and experiences from their own ordinary life.

I prefer not to see research as a mystical process which utilises scientific processes but, rather, to view it as a heightening of 'everyday' processes. It involves entering social situations and making interpretations of them through greater reflection than is usual in interaction because this is the aim of the researcher, rather than because they are endowed with mysterious powers of insight. They must sharpen their awareness and sensitivity towards situations and reflect rather than concentrate upon acting within the situation. Stanley and Wise (1983) state how research must make the researcher and 'her' consciousness the central focus of the research experience:

*"It is an experience like any other, not as something different, special or separated off through the 'adoption' of special techniques such as 'objectivity'."*

(Stanley and Wise 1983)

Having stated my methodological approach in some detail, I should now like to progress with the story of my fieldwork experience, relating the methodological literature to my own experience as a Ph D student which is no doubt different from the consultancy research setting for example. This has provided the basis for my criticisms on methodology and has, more interestingly, provided theoretical insights into the interpretative process which I have used later on in this thesis. Thus the methodology of interpreting behaviour is important not simply as an account of the validity of the data used in the thesis, but as an illustration of interaction and interpretation which is essentially what I am trying to understand. The research experience is, thus, a reflection of interaction and is, therefore, a valuable account in its own right as well as a means of establishing the validity of later accounts.

Before commencing my fieldwork with the Today Theatre Group I had met with various other theatre groups, administrators and performers involved in the Women Live Campaign which enabled me to discuss some of the ideas I had developed from my reading on art theatre and creativity, and to ask them some questions about their life styles and issues of interest to them. These were usually

hurried interviews over a drink normally after a show before the person concerned disappeared off to talk with friends or colleagues. I was, however, able to spend a few weeks with a group in Bristol which revealed with alarming clarity the distinction between my theoretical concerns and their life experiences. I, therefore, had to think about my research techniques and accept that, whilst I had areas of interest and concern, it would have been inappropriate not to focus on the actors' experiences as opposed to spending a good deal of time on issues of theoretical concern only for me. Thus, it was that I somewhat ironically developed certain areas of interest whilst at the same time learnt to be careful not to enforce my own concerns onto the project, as this could only lead to a disastrous set of interviews, and I should concentrate on the actors own accounts of their experiences and the significance they gave to these.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend that researchers free themselves of the constraints of preconceived notions and allow themselves to ground their ideas in the research experience. Whilst I have already stated that this can only be a model rather than a reality for the research process since researchers cannot entirely free themselves from preconceived notions because they cannot deny their own history, experiences and interpretive processes which lead them to consider the future, it was the approach which most aptly fitted with my own views about doing research.

Thus, I took with me to the research setting a number of ideas on the distinction between the creative process and the creative product which initially influenced the manner in which I presented my letter of introduction to the group and, subsequently, their expectations of me. I knew that I wanted to look at the process of 'creating' rather than at the creators themselves, and also that I had rather less precise notions about the relationships between politics and aesthetics in fringe theatre which was not made apparent in my approach.

I decided that I would enter my fieldwork situation prepared to interact with them as much as possible depending upon how much they wanted me to become involved. In my introductory letter I told them that I would either sit quietly and let them get on with it or help out with prompting, scenery or even filling in. I had had so much difficulty gaining access to a group for more than a quick interview that I realised I must accept whatever role I was given and consider the methodological and theoretical implications later. The decision as to whether I was to be a fly on the wall or an active participant was not mine but the group's to make as they had to allow an outsider into their private backstage behaviour and I was prepared to come in on any terms. They had the power to determine my role and my access to data and must choose this carefully because once I gained access to the inner mysteries of the acting profession, I immediately started to gain some power too.

It was decided that I should be a participant observer with the emphasis placed strongly on the observer. I was allowed to join in with the warm up exercises which (for them) were a harmless involvement with me which enabled us all to feel I was participating whilst strictly limiting any empathetic understanding to this area alone. I was told I must feel free to question the group at any time but, on the one and only occasion I interrupted proceedings with a query, I realised that it was an offer politely extended which I must politely not accept.

I quickly learnt that I was to be tolerated by the group because they were in fact rather proud of "*our resident anthropologist*", but had to study them with discretion. Consequently, I chose to keep very quiet and limit my involvement to lunch time chats where there were no signs of interviewing paraphernalia, my notebooks and tape recorders discreetly out of sight. We agreed that I could interview the group members but found this extremely difficult in practice because everyone was so busy and could only get one formal interview with each member.

Even the formal interviews were problematic. When I tried to get close to the individual's perception of the situation, I found that the men in particular used distancing political rhetoric, issuing policy statements rather than personal accounts. They talked about what should be as if it was. The women brought sandwiches with them to the interviews so that we could have an hour-long taped interview session during the lunch break and talk



in some depth, but the men all insisted on being interviewed in a local café which made recording impossible, and by taking notes less ground was covered because it was a much slower process. I had to take notes, however, partly because of information recall but, more importantly, to show that I was researching them, so that when we chatted freely at other times there was possibly a distinction in their minds. I do not think I was being dishonest, betraying any trust, I stated that I was concerned with watching them and would have freely admitted to having noted a conversation had I been asked. I felt that this particular group, however, was quite vulnerable amongst themselves and always seeing me note events would only have increased this. Thus, I noted earlier conversations during innocuous moments when they were running through a text for example.

I did not interpret their formal accounts where they used political rhetoric rather than personal statements as a "deferential response" (cited by Newby 1971) to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear but as a technique to deny me access to personal accounts because they possibly did not want to look at their own feelings themselves and certainly did not want to reveal them to me. As a group of middle class Oxbridge graduates, I could not imagine them feeling deferential to me, they had wide vocabularies and confidence that were equal to mine. I felt that their behaviour was more theoretically significant when placed alongside many of their other actions towards me as distancing techniques, though at the time I was uncertain of the implications

of their behaviour and felt uneasy about their sense of vulnerability because it threatened my work. My own response was to rationalise the group's reactions to me on the grounds that they were very busy, though I could not help but feel emotional about it on occasion.

Throughout my period of involvement with Today I was constantly reminded that I was an outsider. If I helped in any way I was politely thanked, if I offered to make coffee it was refused because the *"guest shouldn't have to make it"*. If they were working on exercises in pairs and someone was absent, the odd person would make a threesome with another couple making the exercise much more difficult for all of them, rather than use me. I was also, at times, reminded of my position of grace with somewhat less subtlety. On one occasion I sat down for a coffee next to one of the group members on a bench in a café and was asked to move to the end of the row so that the group could sit next to one another. I had deliberately taken this position at the request of Sarah who had a broken toe and wanted to sit on the end herself. I, therefore, had to switch positions with a woman on the other side of the table who was on the end of the row. It seemed an extremely trivial but poignant reminder of my status. Other examples of the group's attempts to keep me at arms length were whenever they changed times of rehearsals I was not informed and would arrive an hour early from Bath to find a short note pinned on the door telling me about the new time and often new venue: it seemed that they had not discovered the telephone yet!

However, my position was not always one of being an outsider. To further complicate matters I felt a change in our relationships when the group went on tour. They were received badly for the most part and were increasingly dependent upon hearing soothing words from me, for which I was rewarded by being allowed to work the tape recorder during a rehearsal session. I think that by becoming the familiar trusted audience to the performance every night, they started to trust me a little more and at this time I gained more personal insights into their feelings. This was partly a result of us staying at the same house together on tour and partly through chance incidents such as meeting two of the group at the Arnolfini Art Centre in Bristol. This intense involvement was another reason why I had to be flexible in my approach towards researching them, it would have been too stressful for them to have felt watched all the time.

However, on one occasion during the tour I did become more involved in the group's processes than I had planned. One evening in Bristol at the end of the tour where tempers were at their worst, a simple row over who was going home in the group's car and who was getting a taxi resulted in Stacey walking out on the group. By this time we had become quite friendly and so I was faced with a personal dilemma, did I follow my friend and comfort her or stay with the majority to avoid offending them. I opted for the former and ran after her, entering into the situation myself, despite the possible consequences for my research. It probably proved useful because as I comforted her on the long walk

back to where we were staying, she talked in great detail about the group and the tensions they were all facing whilst the others seemed grateful to me for helping. It was at brief moments like this that I realised that despite my decisions to remain detached, and their technique to distance me, time and physical presence had involved me in the group more than we had all intended. I had become involved despite all our intentions.

It was not, however, an involvement I could take for granted. I had felt increasingly comfortable within the group on tour due to the shifting power relationships that I perceived as they went down badly before their audiences. Nevertheless, after a morning business meeting I opted to go shopping for the group with Kath. Having my note pad and pen upon me, I offered to make a shopping list but was turned down angrily by Barbara who stated that Kath was a member of the group and should make a list if they needed one. I must have looked rather startled and she apologised, but once again I was reminded not to overstep an implicit boundary and made a mental note to behave very discreetly in the group.

Thus it was that I learnt to maintain a low profile within the group whilst simultaneously, trying to gain their trust in me in order to offset any perception of me as a threat. It seemed to me ironic that they had invited me to join their group and observe their creative process, and yet at the same time did all they could to deny me access to any close scrutiny of their behaviour. It was not until much later that I realised the theoretical

implications of this situation: that by inviting me to watch their creative process, I had become an unwitting participant in their fiction and thus reinforced this fiction that they were primarily concerned with the creative process and with producing theatrically exciting performances. My very presence, however, whilst reinforcing the fiction, simultaneously threatened their fiction through the potential of my researcher's role to question their lack of collectivism or lack of concern with the final performance for example. I was, therefore, simultaneously observing the creation of a fiction at an explicit level of the theatrical process, becoming part of a fiction created by the Today Theatre Company: and so had to be either prevented from discovering this through the various distancing techniques outlined previously, or else silenced and thus prevented from asking threatening questions.

The methodological implications which are at issue here, however, are extremely important. Firstly, I have argued that the researcher's experience in itself can provide valuable data, and must therefore be included as data, rather than be seen as a means to an end of collecting first order constructs. It provides access to the 'subtext' which enables the researcher to give different meanings to the actors' accounts rather than always accept them at face value.

Secondly, my experience destroyed for me many of the illusions of the research process as contained in many methodological texts. As Bottomley (1978) so aptly remarks:

*"It is in the realm of data gathering techniques that the discrepancy and the real - what the text books say, compared to what really happens is most apparent. Somehow it doesn't seem to matter how much you read about research methods and their problems, once you experience the research process at first hand in the field, when you are genuinely involved in a research question of your own, the understanding you previously had seems to take on a new dimension."*

(Bottomley 1978)

The reality of my research experience was completely different from my experience of participant observation studies. Firstly, the various debates about the researcher participating or observing being at the expense of the other implies that the researcher chose their style based on what they wanted out of their data and that, secondly, once chosen, this was fairly fixed. I did not chose my approach towards participant observation but was more given a role of discreet observer and dared to challenge it. This role was, however, far from static, as I have already indicated, I became more or less discreet in my behaviour as the situations required. I was an opportunist, attempting to capitalise on every situation for its data in the most appropriate way. It was a more emotionally demanding task than I had expected

because of its uncertainty and because of the power apparatus between us. It was much more ambiguous and full of compromise than the methodologies had led me to expect.

I recognised that whilst I shared similar moods with the group, when they were dull and apathetic I could muster little motivation to take notes and wrote more copious notes when they were lively and excited, I never felt that I developed an empathy so desired by the ethnographers such as Reeves-Sanday and Bryson and Thompson. When they argued heatedly over incidents, such as the placing of a neon tube, it was recorded with a detachment at best because it did not upset my creative process, or at worst caused some stirrings of vulnerability within me that they might not want me to see them arguing and ask me to leave. Like Bottomley (1978), I realised that I was:

*"In it for my own sake and for my own interest, not theirs."*

I began to realise that research was a process which can be manipulated to present an image of the researcher or the research process as a rather mysterious phenomenon whereby the expert alone gains access to an objective reality which exists beyond the ken of most lesser mortals: I also came to see that by doing this the researcher is making their subject unwitting members of a fiction for the researcher or the 'academic environment' whatever this might be. Bryson and Thompson (1978) suggest that often researchers ignore what really happens due to unwritten rules

about research packaging to preserve mystification, and impose a consistency on events where often none exists in real life. As Farraday and Plummer (1979) comment:

*"....researchers seek for consistency in subjects' responses when subjects' lives are often inconsistent."*

I think it is important to realise that life is the same for researchers - ambiguous, inconsistent and contradictory. One should not try to impose categorisations and generalisations to bring a predictability to the data but concentrate on the changing roles and relationships within the research encounters. Drawing upon Bryson and Thompson (1978) once again:

*"In research with an action component issues must be pursued as they arise, and therefore forward planning cannot be comprehensive."*

This view of research requires the researcher to be flexible to other peoples' timetables, however exhausting and demanding, to have constant auditory, psychological and visual vigilance, and warn that ambiguities in relationships are unavoidable under participant observation.

I reject the notion of a continuum from complete participant to complete observer with researchers locating themselves somewhere along this. I was in many ways forced to move along



this continuum, or at least interpreted the situations as requiring this from me. I was an active audience to a performance and, as such, had to be extremely sensitive to the occasion and adapt my behaviour accordingly.

As I stated earlier, I believe that research can be better understood as a heightening of interactive processes rather than as a separate phenomenon whereby people gain mysterious powers of insight and abilities to remain objective contrary to their ordinary ways of behaving. We must as Oakley (1981b) suggests, see that:

*"The mythology of 'hygenic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data reproduction be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives."*

(Oakley 1981b)

Thus, rather than ascribe to a false dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative processes, and to a myth of objectivity, or search for an illusive empathy, or pure grounded approach freed from past experience and theoretical insights, we must cease to view research as an episode conducted within a social vacuum and view it as a social encounter subject to the same processes of interaction, only at a consciously heightened

level. Thus, we can see the research process reflecting interaction reflecting theoretical processes reflecting life.

If we briefly reconsider the essential ingredients of symbolic interactionism, we can see that central to an understanding of human behaviour is the concept of the self, in particular, the dialectic of the 'I' and the 'Me' - the interpreter and the actor interacting with the reflexive part of the self. As a researcher I was primarily concerned with the interpretive and the reflexive possibilities of myself and of the Today Theatre Company.

I was interested in looking at the shared meanings within the group and at the individual definitions of the situation, using the same interpretive processes in doing this as they used to make sense of their world and of the Brecht play in particular. Like the members of the group focusing on the meanings inherent in the text and conveying these to one another, I also focused on the meanings conveyed in their actions and on presenting these for a reader.

Oakley (1981b) stresses the importance of breaking down the researcher/researched distinction. Researchers are not, she argues, omnipotent creatures, blessed with a 'true' understanding of social reality. Whilst I agree with the principles underlying her argument, in carrying out my fieldwork I became aware of the inevitable distinction between the group and myself because of our differing aims, and consequently emphasise rather than blur this

distinction. However, in writing up my thesis I have blurred the distinctions at the level of analytical method, and emphasise the similarities in our behaviour through the interweaving of our experiences.

Having watched the theatrical process as carried out by the theatre group, I could see many similarities between this process and interaction and indeed research. They are all concerned primarily with interpretation and conveying meanings, some of which are conveyed at an explicit and some at an implicit level. Like actors who retain the freedom to create a role for themselves, I believe that interaction can also be a creative process, and recognise the role of the researcher to interpret the subtext and create a fiction for themselves out of the material available and through their interpretation of it. Like the actor who is more analytical with their text than with their encounters in social life the researcher is more reflexive, much more analytical in their interpretive processes than individuals in an ordinary situation, refusing to accept taken-for-granted assumptions at that level, as Mangham (1978) suggests, rendering the 'mundane strange'.

The researcher must, therefore, interpret non verbal gestures, atmospheres and moods as well as the spoken word, and look at conflicting accounts as significant rather than as statements in themselves. They must check and cross check upon their impressions from a variety of situations and use the material

available to make an interpretation of events. As Harré and Secord (1973) remind us, the researcher should concentrate on the actors' personal statements about their behaviour and interpret meaning from them rather than accept them at face value:

*"The things that people say about themselves and other people should be taken seriously as reports of data relevant to phenomena that really exist and which are relevant to the explanation of behaviour. This contrasts with the mistaken view that the statements themselves are the phenomena."*

(Harré and Secord 1973)

Finally throughout this the researcher must remember that like the subjects of their study they are ultimately making interpretations of events. They may reflect more upon their interpretation and try to validate their account rather than simply offer a quick rationalisation after an event, but they are still only constructing a social reality, it is not an objective study of a true reality. It is not a mysterious process and does not constitute anything more than a seriously considered interpretation of events and, as such, is very similar to theatre and in many ways presents and maintains its own fictions with its own characters, heroes and heroines, plots and themes, carried out under certain conventions for its particular audience in mind.

SECTION THREE

THE TODAY THEATRE COMPANY: THE TEXT

### Introduction

In this section I shall present the reader with the text for the performance as outlined in this thesis. I shall introduce the various characters involved in the Today Theatre Company, and shall provide the reader with the background details to their story. Having set the scene I shall focus upon their interpretation of events as they occurred during the fieldwork study, and consider the meanings they gave to their experiences within the Company. Thus in Chapter Four I provide the reader with an outline of their definitions of creativity; and in Chapter Five present their accounts of collectivism. These provide a basis for creating the fiction which constitutes the final section, presented as review of their performance.

### The plot

The Today Theatre Company were a small theatre group set up by two people, Barbara and Nicki: to work for a one year project, which consisted of collectively producing and touring two plays in England and America.

The group consisted of four women and four men from England and North America, all of whom, bar one, were Oxbridge graduates. They formed a group which was to work as an organic unit, growing from within as they gained in experience through working together. They were to work collectively on all areas of the creative process: acting, stagemanagement, directing, lighting and sound

and publicity. Their emphasis lying in the creative process rather than the final product.

The group was formed for one year in 1982, the year of the Women's Live Campaign which aimed to launch women in the performing arts. Women's theatre group performed all round the country in a special Women's Live season in the May. This provided the springboard for the launching of their first tour in Britain during which they performed a play by a Latvian feminist Aspasijia based on the Latvian revolution of 1905.

I joined the group for the start of rehearsals on their second play, an early Brechtian play set in Chicago in the 1920's called In the Jungle of Cities. This centred on the gay relationship of two men and the futile power struggle between them. It attempted to make a critique of capitalist values which centre on power and greed, portraying the resulting alienation of such a way of life. The play was, however, written before Brecht had fully developed his political beliefs and was not terribly good.

In conjunction to rehearsing and touring the Brecht, the Today Company were also tied up with planning their tour of North America in the Autumn. They had to organise venues around Britain and America as well as to fund themselves without any Arts Council subsidies.

### The theme

Their aim was to provide visually entertaining theatre out of their politics and their energy. They hoped to break down the division between work and play; to have fun rehearsing and performing; and to infuse their life with their project. They argued that politics are not only about content but include the contexts in which events happen. They did not simply want to convey an anti-sexist message to their audience but hoped to infuse anti-sexism into their work process. They thus hoped that their style of working as well as their performance would be fun without being oppressive. They hoped to challenge traditional theatrical norms both in their work method and performance style which they hoped reflected contemporary culture.

### The cast

Barbara. Barbara was a small, rather intense Latvian Canadian with short, brown, curly hair. She wore baggy trousers and shirts accompanied by high heels and black footless tights which she always wore half covering her feet. She was a dominant member of the group who made numerous suggestions during rehearsals which often resulted in her interrupting people whilst they were talking. She was surprisingly deferential to Nicki with whom she had worked in an experimental theatre group whilst doing her D Phil at Oxford University. Together they had co-founded this group as an extension of their experiences at Oxford. She was



supported financially by her wealthy father who lived in Canada and wished to assist the group in an attempt to support Latvian culture.

Dave. Was a tall, thin Canadian in his early twenties. He had fine features enhanced by his short hair and glasses. He wore trendily scruffy clothes that were always too big whilst being deliberately short in the leg. He had worked as a hospital porter since graduating with a BA in English at Oxford University, and used savings from this job and social security to finance himself in the group. Whilst at Oxford he had performed in several plays and it was his impressive performance of King Lear which led to his invitation to join the group. He had a sharp sense of humour tinged with a savage edge which he occasionally used to disrupt proceedings.

Kath. A large English woman with a shock of wild and bushy red, curly hair. She was a softly spoken but confident woman who was a fairly assertive member of the group. She was always sensitive to the needs of others within the group and to the requirements of the play. She was careful to balance these two considerations with her own requirements and with her talent for staging and costume. She was an English graduate from Cambridge University where she both acted and directed in traditional and collective theatre settings. She signed on for social security to support herself in the group.

Leam. An Irish Catholic with a strong sense of morality and compassion. He was a shy, obedient member of the group who wanted everyone to get on well together. He was particularly fearful of Nicki and often avoided revealing his more conservative ideas for fear of rejection by him. He worked best in small, intimate numbers rather than group situations, and would quietly get on with his work. He too was an English graduate from Cambridge University in his early twenties, and was simply badly dressed in ill fitting rather tatty clothes. He had no mother and his father died at the beginning of rehearsals which meant that he missed the ground work on The Jungle which probably eroded his confidence in speaking out further. He was one of the two members who had had to audition for the group rather than accept an invitation to join it. He was a rather well-liked oddity within the group, respected but overlooked, who financed himself by signing on.

Nicki. A tall rather emaciated looking English guy with hair shaved at the sides, bleached at the front and hanging in a thin pony tail down his back. Along with a neat moustache and Trotsky style glasses, he wore tee-shirts ripped at the neck and sleeves and extremely tight jeans. In his early twenties, he was an English graduate from Oxford University who had done a one year course in directing at the Old Vic Drama School. With a keen interest in Brecht, gay politics and semiology he was a dominant member of the group, adopting an informal role as director and 'angry, misunderstood young man'.

Sarah. A thin Lebanese New Yorker with long, thick, black hair. She always wore frilly feminine clothes and shawls which contrasted with the rest of the group's attire. She was very quiet and rarely entered into group discussions, preferring to concentrate on acting rather than discussing the text. Whenever she did speak, the group, and Barbara in particular, would often snap abruptly at her, using her as a whipping block in tense situations. She was an English graduate from Harvard University who was working for Time Life magazine before being invited to join the group to perform The Silver Veil. She loved to perform tragedy and leapt at the chance of working on The Silver Veil which complemented her rather dark, mysterious aura. She was financed by her parents and boy friend in New York.

Stacey. Was a zany American woman with a strong sense of humour who loved to have fun. She was well-built with a thick mass of brown hair, glasses and baggy clothes which enhanced her size. She was rather reluctant to contribute to discussions, though she was always eager to improvise with ideas or to clown around. She was the only non-graduate in the group having 'dropped out' of Cambridge University in order to concentrate on her acting. She applied to join this group and was successfully auditioned along with Leam - she was financially supported in the venture by her parents back home.

Terry. A stocky English guy of Polish origin with Mohican haircut, wire rimmed glasses and Oxfam clothes. He would turn up

late and bleary-eyed to rehearsals after late-nights womanising, and would be sleepy throughout the day. He was quietly spoken with a very good sense of humour which he often utilised to smooth tensions in the group. He had a keen sense of social justice and seemed to resent Nicki's domination of the group. He would rarely confront Nicki in a challenging way but would quietly point out when he had overlooked people in the group. He was a sensitive person with well developed ideas which tended to be overlooked, because he was often dismissed as a clown or a snoozer. He was felt to have less interest in the group because he worked some evenings in a cinema to supplement his social security and kept friends outside the group. These negative associations were reinforced in the group's mind by Nicki with whom he had a rivalry stemming from their flat share and previous clown act, in which he was more successful. He was yet again an English graduate from Oxford University in his early twenties.

#### The setting

The group as a whole had very little money to spend on hiring a rehearsal space, providing costumes, scenery or transport. They were thus forced to work in a variety of community centres, church halls and occasionally Leam's house, which they were allowed to use for free.

The main rehearsal space they used was a community centre near Kings Cross. This was a tiny room in a basement with busy traffic

providing a constant background rumble, which was occasionally shattered by the vibrations of prams or trolleys being pushed over the grills covering the lighting vents on the pavement above. There were no facilities available to the group for making drinks or food, these had to be brought in from a nearby take-away, though they did have the use of a loo. The room was always cold and damp despite it being summer, was poorly lit, and took a lot of imagination to divide into stage or 'floor space' and audience.

They could only get into this centre at certain times which imposed restrictions on the rehearsals. Occasionally one of the community centre organisers would forget to turn up and we would all be sat around outside waiting to get started. Someone would have to cycle off to find him and bring him back with the keys. On other occasions a mother and toddler group would be going on at the same time, and they were forced to work over the noise of children screaming.

The group were eventually forced to move to a new rehearsal space, breaking down the continuity of a familiar, even if unsatisfactory, setting. Tape recorders and costumes had to be moved around London on bicycles, and new cafés providing reasonably priced lunches had to be found.

Due to a shortage of money they also had limitations placed on costume and scenery. For The Jungle they had to simulate a library scene, the inside of a house, a bar scene and a wood.

They could not attempt to provide realism even if they had wanted to. They wrote to 'Vladivar' for a large Vodka poster which provided the back drop to the stage. They concentrated on the image of drink, cocktails and partying throughout as a theme for depicting capitalism and fun. They made only minor alterations between scenes without attempting to hide any of this from the audience. They kept costume racks on stage, changed costume before the audience and made no attempts to disguise wires etc.

They relied on imagery for many of the scenes. For example, the library scene consisted of the gangsters wearing fluorescent socks and reading books painted in luminous colours in front of a neon tube which made them glow. Two gangsters threw these books backwards and forwards between them to maintain the pace and tension throughout the scene. Unfortunately one of them would always drop a book which slightly ruined the idea.

#### Rehearsals.

These would start with administration. Members of the group would feed back information and assign new tasks for themselves, such as writing to theatre venues, printing posters, arranging their American tour and deciding upon materials needed for the performance. Members of the group would volunteer for various tasks whether it be telephoning City Limits or the Guardian to organise a review, or dashing down to the print shop to see how their hand-outs were getting on.

Rehearsing the text took one of two forms: presenting ideas to one another through performance or through discussion. They switched around the text exploring anything from two lines to a scene. They did not cast roles for a long way into rehearsals, so that they could concentrate on the meaning contained in the text rather than identifying with particular characters. They would improvise suggestions for one another or else they would break into small groups to work on an interpretation of an idea to present to the group.

This phase of rehearsals was called "storming the text". During this period they had a major emphasis on process, resulting in extremely fluid and dynamic rehearsals. They would try games or 'brain storming' sessions to generate a wealth of ideas for future evaluation. They hoped that their collective direction would generate a wider range of ideas and feeling of freedom amongst them to improvise new suggestions.

It gradually emerged, however, that some peoples' ideas were lost more than other peoples' in the brain storming sessions; and that suggestions were directed more towards Nicki than to anyone else for approval. Some members of the group dominated proceedings more than others, and would cut into the performances of those who developed ideas through improvisation rather than discussion.

Eventually they cast the play. They did this whilst working in two single sex groups, so that the men decided who would perform the male parts and the women the female characters. There were some women playing male gangsters which were cast by the women's group too. There was a concentration within the play on two male characters with supporting roles for the women. Thus those playing lesser parts were given additional sequences to perform between scenes.

Once the play was cast they tended to work on their character at rehearsals, though they would still swap roles occasionally to demonstrate an idea for someone else. They would perform "on the floor" whilst the rest of the group sat "in the audience". The numbers directing in the audience would range from none to seven, depending upon the scene. Sometimes someone would start directing whilst they were on the floor, which would add to the chaos as eight people would be contributing from different viewpoints.

The group seldom worked on developing the ideas produced in rehearsals. Once they had reached an agreed interpretation, and a visual presentation of that idea, they were moved on by Nicki to a fresh area of the text. They concentrated on the process of making, so that they constantly evolved new approaches to the play rather than working on an end product.

Rehearsals continued whilst the group were on tour but took a slightly different format. Here there was more of an emphasis on



discussion, analysing problems within the performance, and considering improvements; as well as planning future venues and the problems these entailed. There tended to be an atmosphere of disgruntled exhaustion which contrasted with the energy and excitement which characterised the early rehearsals.

Members of the group became increasingly exhausted by a continuous cycle of setting up, performing, clearing away, discussing the show, sleeping and rehearsing the following day before setting up once more. The encompassing nature of their work became an increasing strain on all of them, upsetting their relationships with family and friends outside of the group, and relationships within it. They were always engaged in their creative process, and were never able to withdraw from it. Towards the end of the tour they were so exhausted that when they weren't discussing business they hardly spoke to one another, leaving a pervasive gloom hanging over the entire group.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

##### GETTING THEIR ACT TOGETHER

*"For me a rehearsal room is a kitchen, where you combine ingredients as they come to hand, testing tasting. Finally you apply flame, and the thing grows; exactly how, one never knows. You put the dough in the tin, but what shape will the loaf be? It's out of your hands."*

(Callow 1984)

In this chapter I shall present the story of the creative process for the Today Theatre Company as they told it. I shall start by outlining remarks on the creative process by some of the group members who felt that their interpretation of creativity was typical of the underlying rationale to their group's work. I will then move onto a consideration of their experience of this process as they perceived it. This will involve looking at the separation between their ideals for the company and their experience of creativity in the performance and rehearsal setting. I shall also consider some of the problems they felt they faced in trying to carry out their work. I use the actors' accounts wherever possible, though there are some interpretations of events based on a variety of observations and quick comments, which would not have been significant in their own right, which I have included when necessary to provide a fuller picture to events.

The Today Theatre Company approach was set out in their publicity handout and sent to various theatre administrators throughout the country. In it they stated their company's philosophy towards creativity and the theatrical performance, which the reader should bear in mind as a backdrop for the rest of the chapter. In it they argued that they were formed for a one year project to:

*"....put out performance that is as spectacular, as entertaining, and as up to date as current developments in, for instance, music and video. We're especially interested in getting visual and physical excitement out of a minimum of technical means, without resorting to either conventional or expensive means. Stylistically we want theatre not plays: politically we're a collective, our energies come from feminism and the left."*

Today argued that they were trying to create "theatre" which they distinguished from "plays" because they argued, they were more concerned with producing spectacle and conveying ideas than reproducing a text. They hoped to do this through an expression of their political beliefs which incorporated attitudes towards both establishment and fringe theatre groups, and towards traditional interpretations of creativity within theatre where the responsibilities and roles of both actors and directors are, they argued, more clearly defined. Their approach was thus based on a reaction against both traditional, and some agit-prop, theatre

companies. It represented an attempt to move towards a style of working which reflected their own views on sexual politics within theatre specifically, and society generally.

It was a manifesto, which I felt was understood by some members of the group better than others. Clear interpretations of their policy were, I felt, restricted to a few members of the group, others (as the following chapters reveal), were slightly more interested in the opportunities to perform, rather than the political idealism of the organisation. It is important that the reader gains an understanding of their approach, as it is outlined in the following pages, and the strength of conviction with which their ideology was put forward by some of the group, and to a lesser extent perhaps, accepted by all of the group. Many of their ideals were, I felt, at times too much of a constraint on their behaviour; many were often disregarded; and yet, these very same ideals could be held up as explanations for events on occasions when perhaps another reason may have more accurately accounted for their actions. By this I mean that at times their experimentation and process proved too exhausting for some members of the group, particularly those most concerned with performing, and their resentments resulted in their privately disregarding many of their ideals. If questioned about this, however, they could draw upon some part of their manifesto to account for the situation. For example Nicki, one of the worst actors in the group, who is coincidentally also the most dominant individual in the group, is

given the leading role in the play. This is put down to an emphasis on political content rather than a reluctance to argue.

Today felt that they were concerred with redefining creativity within the theate, with finding new roles and relationships both for themselves as performers and for their audience. Their feelings towards what they called "traditional theatre" was that it was hierarchical with a director who largely imposed "his" wishes upon the cast, whilst the support personnel, the administrators, and technicians were completely overlooked, resulting they felt in theatre which is rather lacking in some way. Terry was critical of traditional theatre because:

*"I find traditional theatre boring because it's false. It ignores the basic facts of its operation. I feel it isn't real because it hasn't considered something."*

He strongly resented the emphasis placed on the final performance rather than on the creative process for the individuals concerned, resulting in theatre shrouded in mystique rather than a satisfying process for the actors concerned.

*"Theatre is oriented towards product. You're not encouraged to think about anything else but a product that arrives vacuum packed, so that any intrusion of the mechanics is regarded as really heinous - so fluffing the lines is regarded with horror because it destroys the magic illusion."*

As a result, he argued, directors operating within this type of theatre had too much control over the performance at the expense of the actors' creative potential:

*"In producing a play with a director they have the idea, and even if you're asked for opinions it comes chronologically after the director's, therefore, they still frame the presentation."*

Their work as a group was based on a reaction against their perception of traditional theatrical norms. They wanted to widen the control within the group, to choose to collectively direct themselves, and to acknowledge all areas of the creative process rather than present a smooth running show that concealed all the work prior to production. Acting was only one part of the creative process along with stage management, lighting, costume and publicity. They wanted to recognise the importance all these various facets of a successful production by taking them all on collectively, and then to make this style of working apparent in their work. As Terry once again argues:

*"One has an idea of an atmosphere that one wants to create and that arises from the imagination. Blocking is part of the mechanics of that operation; lighting again is the mechanics of that operation - through it is not generally recognised as such - what we're doing is recognising and trying to make*

*apparent is that creativity can't take place without people who do costume and set."*

The group rejected the idea that a piece of work had to be original to be creative, as Kath pointed out:

*"Everything in art is influenced by things before. We're trying to develop influences from contemporary culture which is bound to lead to some similarities. You work through other influences, anyhow, before you can decide upon your own."*

They wanted to develop contemporary political and musical influences in their performance using bright lights, vivid posters, huge brightly coloured cocktails and taped music. They wanted to adopt an extremely stylised 1940s Hollywood acting technique to generate 'spectacle' rather than to try and perform a play. They were delighted when a professional dance company performing at Sadler's Wells used an idea similar to their's and played musical chairs on stage. This, they argued, showed professional groups successfully using similar untraditional techniques vindicating much of their work.

Creativity did not lie, therefore, in originality for the Today Theatre Group but in process. It was their chosen organisational structure and approach to performances which developed their creative potential, rather than appearing in a highly polished, original adaptation of a play. They saw

themselves as a reaction against conventional theatre, but more surprisingly felt that they did not fit the mould of alternative fringe theatre groups either. They felt that the notion of process inherent throughout their work separated them from both types of organisation. They wanted to infuse their work with their politics which they felt was an anathema to conventional theatre, and overlooked in fringe theatre. They felt that some fringe theatre groups would simply present didactic theatre whilst ignoring the politics of their performance in their own work, thus, argued Terry, separating what they said from what they did:

*"I've seen agit-prop going out to evangelise and yet they've had an authoritarian work process, and they are fucked before they start."*

They weren't happy to simply present a political message in their performance, but wanted to live by their politics, breaking the separations between work and play; between performance and rehearsals; and between theatre and politics. Kath told me that:

*"What we don't agree with is that separation between politics and the quality of theatre. You know the fact that we work collectively comes across in our performance. We work collectively on stage as well as in rehearsal, and that comes through without, without portraying an idea, we work by that idea."*



To emphasise the notion of process they felt that it was essential not only to work by their politics but to blur the distinction between rehearsals and performance, rendering the performance as simply another stage in the work process. The performance would never be a final product that remained fixed, performance after performance, but would be worked on, and altered after a show, which was simply part of a cycle. For Barbara:

*"The performance and the rehearsals are so....you know.... there's a very easy relationship between them. It's not kind of, 'the final product will be what happens in Cambridge'. There's, it's a process, there's an importance in the process involved in the way we feel about things. We want the performance to be part of it all, of the whole thing."*

One advantage, she argued, of this style of working was that it supposedly reduced the tension of playing before an audience:

*"I always get first night kind of jitters and nerves when I'm in something, and I don't have, I don't have that feeling at all like when we're on tour with The Silver Veil. It was like, you know, we'd drive to a city, and we'd set up and we'd perform, and it was all kind of together. It was much more a working performance and integrated. The feeling that you're performing the whole time is very good - I like that."*

By placing so much time and energy in the process rather than concentrating on the final product they felt that they were challenging traditional work practices, and notions of creativity in conventional establishment theatre. They were trying to create a different type of performance which couldn't be judged by traditional aesthetic standards. Their work would not be as polished as performances by other theatre companies, but as Kath said, at least it would be theirs':

*"Creativity is a word that has an association with standard theatre, and we're trying to rework how people express themselves. So I may not be expressing myself to my full extent, but I am happier because what I am expressing is not oppressive."*

They were, therefore, at least in principle, concerned more with the conditions under which they created, than with the resultant performance. They wanted to challenge traditional theatre companies, and even some fringe theatre companies which they felt were organised along hierarchical lines. They were not necessarily concerned with making an original interpretation to a text, or even with stretching their acting potential to its limits, which they didn't, but were more concerned with developing themselves holistically in the various theatrical procedure, and thus, they argued, develop the creative potential within all of them, by collectively sharing in this process.

Their decision to operate in this way was not without its consequences at an immediate, aesthetic and material level or at an organisational level. Through rejecting a director and incorporating collective directing and creative process into their work they created certain difficulties for themselves which were to prove a strain in the long run, which had to be offset against the personal satisfaction derived through their supposedly greater control over their work. As we see later, however, lack of feeling for the text, and an absence of control over their work seemed more typical of their group's operations in practice.

Partly by their rejection of conventional theatrical practices and traditional assumptions regarding performance, though largely through their newness as a group, they received no Arts Council subsidies to help finance their work, whilst they also had no loyal audience following, upon which more established groups can rely, to turn up to a performance and generate some income for the group. As a result, both the individual members, and the group as a whole, suffered from financial poverty, which was not without its effects.

Aesthetically they had little money to spend on costume and scenery, or transport for these to a venue. Consequently they were limited to what they could borrow from friends, or received in donations from large companies, and to what they could carry themselves. Lack of finance affected the aesthetics in a more insidious way too. Because they had no money to hire a permanent

rehearsal space, they were forced to use a variety of places which they could use free of charge. This meant them using numerous sites around London, most of which were unsuitable for the purposes, but more devastatingly broke down any continuity they might have sought to assist the smooth running of rehearsals. As Nicki commented to me one morning as we waited to go into a community centre:

*"We're forced to work in small, cramped, unreliable places and we haven't got a car to get these - it's all a drain. In a professional theatre you would know that you had a large rehearsal space with mirrors, coffee machines, and heating - it's all a question of economics."*

At a personal level they all lived in cramped conditions together to save money. This produced various personal rivalries and strains brought to the rehearsal space, which inevitably affected their working together. All the women and Dave lived in one flat, whilst Nicki and Terry lived in another, Leam living with his brothers and sisters in their parents' house. They encountered various problems with their landlords and from the DHSS, whilst signing on entailed missing a whole morning's rehearsals. Terry tried to take on a part time job at a cinema to alleviate his own poverty but this was seen as a lack of commitment by the rest of the group, and caused tensions throughout the company. Their ideology encompassed their lives completely, they were tied physically and mentally to the group,

both inside and outside of rehearsals, with consequent effects on their work.

The lack of money could seem extremely daunting at times which made people fed up at rehearsals, or else tension from the flat sharing would creep in to disrupt procedures. This bleak feeling of being on the dole and being hassled by unsympathetic landlords, was summed up by Terry as rather unfortunately being reflected in the play, thus engulfing them in an atmosphere of hardship continually:

*"I find it all a bit much at the moment. It's a very cynical play together with what's happening to me at the moment. Heavies coming round to get us out of the flat. Iv'e no money and it all ties in with the play."*

Their poverty, they argued, meant that they couldn't afford to spend too long on rehearsals in case members lost interest in the group and drifted off to find work. Fear of the group distintegrating through financial difficulties was one of the reasons for them deciding to set up for a one year project only, thus making it easier, they argued, for members to ratain a commitment, as there was an end in sight. They felt that they needed to perform regularly to generate enthusiasm and, hopefully, to bring money to the group. They thus imposed time constraints on themselves which again influenced the aesthetics of their work. Coupled with the enormous range of activities they assigned

themselves, exhaustion was to prove an influencing factor on the group's behaviour throughout.

For The Jungle, they had six weeks in which to rehearse the play, negotiate the tour, plan the advertising, arrange the printing of handbills and posters, write to various organisations for donations, plead with friends for costumes and scenery, collate a sound track for the performance and plan their North American tour. This plethora of activities did not pose a problem at the beginning of rehearsals when they were fresh and energetic but as the weeks went by, as exhaustion and tension mounted it posed a serious problem to the survival of the group. As Nicki commented:

*"Now is the time when being a collective really bites deep. You have to work as a stage manager, director, technician, administrator and performer. The first few weeks it's great because you have time to think, but now it's all very hectic and pressurized."*

The pressure of having to do these various activities, and the demands this placed on their energy and time was seen as having a direct effect on their work:

*"I'm sure most actors could produce good performances because they have directors who push them, and they only rehearse,*

*they never do administration, they never do this, they never do that."*

The lack of energy and feeling of constantly working under pressure generated tensions within the group which hindered them working. They were, ironically, forced to abandon changes at times simply because their process orientation was too exhausting. Kath told me in confidence on day that:

*"Exhaustion is proving to be a real problem. We put so much energy into administration and technical problems that the performance becomes secondary."*

Whilst Sarah complained bitterly that:

*"We just don't rehearse enough....we only get to practice as we perform and then it's too difficult to change things because it makes people nervous."*

Their politics manifested themselves in the work process organisationally through their decision to work as an organic unit on all areas of the creative process, developing their skills as a collective rather than recognising the talents of individual artists, and thus, they hoped making it apparent that successful theatre is dependent upon all members of the creative process rather than the actors on stage:

*"If you say to someone 'creativity' then the immediate picture which emerges is the individual artist, and yet there are so many factors involved in a group process - factors which are political. The question of the lights in traditional theatre would never be considered to have any relevance to 'creativity'. But what we're doing is recognising and trying to make apparent is that creativity cannot take place without people who do costume and the set."*

Creativity for the Today Theatre Company did not rest simply with the actors who performed the play, but with the numerous support personnel whose work they felt goes unrecognised. It was essential to them that all members of the group gain some knowledge of all aspects of a performance and participate in the overall process rather than 'the performance' alone.

As a result of their belief in process and their political opposition to hierarchy, they decided that the most appropriate organisational structure for their group was to be a collective, and that this should extend even to the directing, that they would collectively direct rehearsals. This they argued was a more creative way of working because it would generate a wider range of ideas that could be used in their work, and would utilise their various talents to the fullest. Barbara pointed out the creative advantage of collective directing in that it overcame the individual weaknesses in directors through pooling the talents of eight of them:



*"I have trained as a director, but I know my weaknesses. I can do wonderful pictures and mood settings but I am terrible in that I don't know how to tell an actor to show a character, or to develop a character. That's something that Leam is very good at because he can do it himself, and when Leam comes out with some pointers on acting, they are usually really, really helpful."*

They operated the collective directing in principle on the system that the people sitting out of the performance would direct those acting the scene. This meant that at any one time there could be between one and seven people watching a scene and commenting upon it, whilst at times no-one at all was sat out, or else the whole group would enter into a discussion on a point. At times one member of the group fired with inspiration would leap up and demonstrate an idea taking on the role of another member on stage, for a matter of moments or perhaps for the rest of the scene.

For the first few weeks of the rehearsals the characters in the play weren't even cast so that no-one could concentrate on establishing a character for themselves, but were forced to look at the meanings contained within the text, and various ways of interpreting these on stage. They would all perform the various characters, sometimes dwelling on four lines for a whole morning. They would all direct each other's performances and gain for

themselves, they believed, the widest variety of interpretations from which they could select the best one for the performance.

They were, they argued, less concerned with identifying characters and convincingly portraying them, than with the meanings conveyed in the characterisations. They felt that conveying the notions of process and political soundness were more important than traditional notions of theatrical effectiveness. They wanted to convey to their audience some of the chaos of the creative process and their collectiveness, as well as portray their interpretation of the text without offending members of the group or their audience.

These concerns were to directly affect the aesthetics of their performance. Sequences were introduced to convey chaos such as a game of "tig" at the end of the show. They argued that they were concerned with the meanings portrayed before the audience over convincing portrayals of characters and thus did not consider acting ability when casting the play.

Nicki, who had very little acting experience, was chosen as Schlink, one of the leading protagonists in the play. This seemed strange to me because all the other men in the group had far greater acting experience and were more convincing theatrically in the part. I suspected that Nicki was given this part because he was the most dominant member of the group and no-one dared challenge him. This may have been the case, but they were able to

defend the decision through their own rhetoric - as Dave put it to me:

*"The reason for taking a part is not whether someone is a good actor. Nicki is not a good actor - he's done performance parts, but not plays with lines. None of us think about performance in that way. We're more interested in what makes someone do something, not how well an individual performs."*

I found the idea that they all wanted Nicki, who was recognised as a poor actor, for the leading role difficult to accept and suspected that the group could not be entirely satisfied with the choice because they had to support his performance before an audience. I could never draw any of them to directly state that they resented him getting the role, but as time went on I was to discover other incidents where members weren't personally happy about a situation, but would try to defend it in terms of the group's ideologies. This was particularly the case when I looked at their perception of collectivism (see the following chapter).

They could defend Nicki's role as being constant with their concerns throughout the play and pointed out the priority they gave to sexual politics over traditional dramatic performance. They would not, they argued, present a hysterical woman on stage, drawing upon accepted stereotypes of femininity and the weakness of women. They argued that they were concerned with looking at

the social conditions which produced this hysteria, and what political message this conveyed to their audience.

They argued that the audience would see far more than a well acted performance of a woman crying, and simply applaud a convincing scene. They argued that it would reinforce stereotypes held by their audience of women as weak and emotional in contrast to strong, assertive men. The result of this, they felt, would be to oppress both the women performing the play and the women in the audience through the perpetuation of sexual stereotypes:

*"When the choice is theatrical effectiveness or right sexual politics we choose to make the sexual political point. For example when Barbara plays Mary, she doesn't do a lot of crying and sobbing, there is no blatant sexual exposure of women."*

In one scene Schlink is mocking Mary who is on love with him. It is a cruel and degrading situation for Mary who is played by Barbara, who in fact completely refused to perform the lines as they were. She stopped rehearsals and asked:

*"Can we think of ways of doing this scene without actually doing it to a woman. It's very easy to manhandle and degrade a woman, it's so often done. It's bad to see anyone degraded, but it's even worse when it's a woman. Maybe it could be a buttoned up dress not a person."*

Whilst Stacey suggested that:

*"Maybe the woman's response could be strong so that she isn't degraded. It's up to a woman not to accept degrading positions."*

This scene forced them to discuss a variety of presentations which wouldn't reinforce the degradation of women and would show their disapproval as a theatre company of Schlink's behaviour. Their ideas ranged from playing with a man, standing her on a chair above Schlink, to giving her a gun and making her equally aggressive. It was decided eventually that Barbara should stand on a chair holding Mary's costume on a coat hanger whilst the scene was performed. The result was a creative balance between their politics and theatre.

The material situation faced by the group and the various assumptions underlying their work were to affect the group on a number of levels. The shortage of funds constrained the range of materials for costume and settings available to them, forcing valuable time to be spent on overcoming these deficiencies in their performance. Poverty exacerbated tensions off-stage for the group members, making some rehearsals rather strained, and with a sense of urgency to perform before group members went off in search of financial rewards elsewhere.

These material constraints were to make the operation of their politics in practice much more difficult, as they seemed caught between poor living and working conditions and a very exacting physically, mentally and emotionally style of working. Ironically, by concentrating on the creative process, they were often too busy, too tired or simply tense, to actually work on their performance, or to make any improvements to this public aspect of the creative process.

Barbara , who was usually one of the more forcefully energetic members of the group, pushing the others along at rehearsals, erupted one morning on tour with the plea:

*"I just don't want to try anything new until September. I just don't want to think about the show. I'd like to just go to film matinees every afternoon."*

As well as the sheer enormity of the tasks facing the group: arranging their own tour, their publicity, transport, costume, scenery, lighting, acting and directing, and the resulting exhaustion from undertaking all of these, was an underlying dissatisfaction with the way the group operated, and the effect this had on their work. As I mentioned earlier, they felt that they got more ideas through their way of working, arguing that by collectively performing and directing the play without casting until a later date, their work would contain greater meaning and be more creative.

However, whilst Osborne (1953) in his principles for brainstorming argues for the 'suspension of judgement' - the provision of a non-evaluative environment where ideas can flow freely without any fear of criticism - he does stress that this is only one stage of a process. He emphasizes that once the ideas have been generated they must be evaluated, and the best ones worked on and developed. This is the disciplined stage of the creative process where the potential of the ideas are developed and polished for public presentation.

One of the traditional roles of a director within theatre is to ensure that the ideas are worked on until they are technically perfect. This can cause resentment directed towards the director, who can cope with their unpopularity more easily if they are slightly detached from the actors. In the Today Company this was much more difficult because they were concerned with working ensemble, and were aware of a tension faced by all of them. Thus it was difficult for them to openly criticize one another which is one of the important roles of the director. They would always couch criticisms in polite terms:

*"I really respect that idea , that's why I'm giving it so much consideration but....."*

More importantly, the very chaos that they argued helped them to generate ideas, seemed to permeate all their rehearsals, to the dismay of some of the group. They never worked on developing the

potential of their ideas by disciplined work and rework until the timing and pacing of a scene was just right, even though this was seen as a tragedy by some of the group members.

They would work as a collective to fulfil the director's roles of interpreting the text, but would fail to discipline themselves to develop a scene for the final performance. Kath, for one, would get enraged by this situation. She would constantly try to make them concentrate on timing and pacing, but would get overridden by Nicki in particular, who preferred to explore fresh ideas. She told me during lunch, after a frustrating morning where she had unsuccessfully tried to prevent the group simply abandoning good ideas undeveloped for the sake of the next scene that:

*"If something is sloppy then you can only get rid of it by work, work, work. There is no task master in a collective, and it's very necessary if you want to be good. It's very difficult to execute ideas. You must know yourself well as a performer, and we're all very inexperienced. You must know your own limitations."*

To a lesser degree Barbara echoed this need for stricter directing. She did not see it as a fault of collectives, or even of inexperienced actors that their work was not reaching its potential, but felt that whilst their style of working fitted The



Silver Veil, it was inappropriate for the requirements of the Brecht.

*"In The Silver Veil we didn't need such constant criticism of the way things were done. We tended to find, we quickly found ways of performing, and in this you can find ways of performing, but its all the execution of it. It's what is actually relies on and in that sense it is more truly theatrical than The Silver Veil, because it is saying much less and was written with much less real emotion."*

Stacey also commented on the fact that in The Silver Veil someone from the group was always sat out watching them work even though they felt it didn't need directing. Whereas with the Brecht they could all be performing on stage, directing themselves as they went along, which she felt meant that they in effect had no director, and that ironically this play needed one more:

*"The Silver Veil didn't need a director, but maybe this play does, or at least someone to watch it. We always had someone sitting out in The Silver Veil."*

The Jungle required more of a concentration of attention on style and pace as they were trying to imitate a stylised Hollywood forties femme fatale movie. They did not switch roles as they had in The Silver Veil which meant it was frustrating:

"....having characters that you to hold onto. You don't get to explore as a performer as you did in The Silver Veil. It was a more collective piece due to this role switching and the use of the stage with curtains that had to be pulled back;

"In The Silver Veil if you were out you were working whereas here you sit waiting and watching we don't have something to pull us together."

In The Silver Veil their concentration on an ensemble process and intuitive acting suited the requirements of the play. They swapped roles to prevent the audience identifying with characters and to demonstrate a universal message in the play. With the Brecht, they maintained their hostility towards members identifying with their characters and yet did not switch roles despite the play's concentration on the two main protagonists.

They tried to think of inter lopes to give the rest of the company bigger parts in the play which resulted in brief solos between scenes. They spent a lot of time trying to invent some ensemble process within the performance, and devised games to play on stage, before and after the show, to present themselves as a whole to the audience. It seemed in many ways to be a rather unsuccessful way of trying to deceive themselves that they were all an equal party to the performance and enjoying themselves doing it, when in fact several of the group, as Sarah, just simply didn't like the play:

*"One of the problems with The Jungle was that some of us didn't like it. I joined to work on The Silver Veil, I was really excited about that."*

It would seem that there was some dissatisfaction amongst the group over the vehicle for their creative process namely Brecht's In the Jungle of Cities. Members of the group did not particularly like the content of the play, nor did they feel it suited their style of working, or as more often seemed to be case, that they didn't feel their style of working suited the Brecht. There was not the same enjoyment of the creative process that had been stressed in their rhetoric and it was questionable whether they succeeded in putting it across as a performance that was "spectacular" and "entertaining" as was promised in their handouts. It was also very doubtful from their comments and their general mood on tour that they felt they had succeeded in redefining creativity within the theatre and in finding new roles for themselves and their audience.

During this chapter there seems to be a shift in the meaning given to their work by the Today Company. There is a sharp contrast between the original optimism and enthusiasm towards their project and the resentments and dissatisfaction expressed when they refer to the experience of producing the Brecht. Relationships between the group members became increasingly strained throughout rehearsals and pitched to a dangerous low whilst they were on tour. There were several incidents of petty

bickering and resentments (some of which I outline in the following two chapters) particularly towards the end of the tour when exhaustion and discontentment produced a pervasive gloom throughout the group.

This gloom sprang out of a dissatisfaction with their work and with their way of working. I felt it was evidence that they had been far less successful in fulfilling their aims artistically and politically than they had anticipated at the outset of their project. Their show was not seen by the audience or theatre critics as a creative success. I mingled with members of the audience after the show listening to various comments on the performance, and asked some people directly what they thought about it. Their responses were generally unfavourable:

*"I was embarrassed for them because I was never sure whether it was a chaotic mixture of styles or not."*

*"It was a bad play which lacked anyone style to hold it together."*

I was fortunate enough at one performance to find myself sat next to a theatre critic from the Guardian and seized the opportunity to discuss the performance with him. He was most scathing of their work which he found naïvely attempting to be original in a similar way to all other groups performing a Brecht for the last fifteen years. He was unsympathetic to their choice

of play and to their presentation of it, and of themselves. They merely served to confirm his prejudices against Brecht and collectivism by a lack of timing and conviction to persuade him otherwise as our conversation shows:

Sue: *Do you think it is original?*

Critic: *No, not at all.*

Sue: *Have you enjoyed it?*

Critic: *No.*

Sue: *Why?*

Critic: *I feel as if they are delivering little speeches. If it were faster it could be funny.*

Sue: *Do you think it's them or the text?*

Critic: *Oh I think they are talented but the play is dreadful. The only good Brecht is dead Brecht.*

Sue: *Do you think it's less polished because it's a collective?*

Critic: *No, but I shall say I like the girl with the pony tail and the girl with the red hair.*

Sue: *Are you more or less sympathetic because of their politics?*

Critic: *What politics?*

Sue: *Because they are a collective.*

Critic: *Oh God no! I don't believe in collectives. It's like making the England football team a collective - they'd never win a match.*

Sue: *They don't do they?*

Critic: *Yes.*

Sue: *They didn't lose any in the World Cup but they didn't win too many either.*

Critic: *Ok, making the Italian team a collective. Besides, if they were really true to their politics they wouldn't have reviews from critics at all.*

Sue: *So they invited you?*

Critic: *Oh yes. They adopt the Brechtian notion which is anti the cult of personality, but I'll blow it for them by singling out those who are good. I don't believe you can have a*

collective in the acting world because those with most talent hive off into careers. It's the most ruthless world of social Darwinism. People pay to see stars.

Sue: *Don't you think this is fairer?*

Critic: *Oh yes it's fairer, but people want to see the most talented. What would have happened to Lawrence Olivier if there wasn't a hierarchy for the talented?*

Sue: *He'd be paid less.*

Critic: *But some directors would want to channel his talents.*

Sue: *But look at all the stage designers etc who support Olivier who remain unrecognised.*

Critic: *A good designer would get recognition. Anyway people don't want to see the good design, they want a star. (He turns to his wife.) Why have they got ITV adverts on in Chicago in the 1920's? I find it very distracting.*

Wife: *It's a surrealist image of the penetrtrion of capitalism. They don't want a naturalist realism.*

Sue: *Who's writing this article?*

Critic: *I am but sometimes she qualifies things for me.*

Wife: *Do you like Garga?*

Critic: *No, I like the one with the green face in both his parts,  
and the one in the overcoat.*

Wife: *Oh I love Garga, he's so sexual I really fancy him.*

Critic: *Well I don't. I was going to say the first half wasn't  
very long, but it was.*

Sue: *Well you must have enjoyed it then.*

Critic: *No, I fell asleep and woke up and they were saying the  
same thing.*

Sue: *Was that them do you think?*

Critic: *No, Brecht was terribly repetitive.*

Sue: *Well they don't like Brecht either, they have presented a  
critique of him.*

Critic: *What makes you say that?*



Sue: *Oh the way they use the dress rather than degrade the woman which was written in the play. Didn't you see that?*

Critic: *Oh I saw that but it might have been in the text, how can you tell?*

Sue: *Do you think it was a bit pretentious?*

Critic: *No, I think it was very pretentious.*

With this final damning comment we ceased the discussion. He wrote a heavily sarcastic review for the Guardian stating that when Minder came up on the television on stage he was, *"within an ace of asking them to turn the sound up."*

This conversation raises a number of issues. Firstly, that the group faced hostility in what they were doing and, therefore, had to be very good to convince others of the success of their way of working. They failed to make it clear that creativity was not synonymous with originality but with process. Their deliberate eclecticism was not seen as such by their audience because they failed to utilise theatrical codes to communicate that this was a conscious decision to their audience, who simply saw a 'mishmash' of styles. They lacked the pace and timing to bring humour to lighten the play, and failed to distinguish between themselves and the text. Any theatre goer accustomed to Brechtian devices could not readily identify Today's creative innovations between scenes

from alienation techniques commonly used in Brechtian plays. I mentioned this to Barbara after the show who was most surprised at my comments and repeated them immediately the group came together after the show. I felt that such an oversight was either extremely naïve or else reflected their lack of consideration of the audience's perspective, being so caught up in their creativity for themselves.

From watching various audiences during the tour, noting the absence of laughter and at times strained response to the production, I felt that Today theatrically failed to produce the spectacle they had originally sought. I felt that they lacked any polish necessary in the performance to successfully portray their ideas, to challenge traditional expectations of theatre and redefine creativity. This was a failure which paradoxically stemmed partly from their emphasis on process for itself, rather than on conveying process in a performance. They were so process orientated that images once decided upon were abandoned in the search for new ideas, rather than perfected for communication to others. Consequently images were often sloppily performed on stage, and as a friend of Leam's noted:

*"if you're going to be stylish, you can't afford to be clumsy.  
You're cutting your own throats."*

I felt that many of the problems in their performance stemmed from a lack of consideration for the audience, and that the

creative process was often more for the group themselves rather than to produce a performance for an audience to consume. I stated in Chapter One that creativity depended upon the creator's perceptions of their audience. It seemed to me from their belittling comments on their audience after a show; and from their attitudes towards one another and to their work; that the primary audience for their performance was not in fact the paying audience but the group themselves.

I recognised that some of the group were more concerned with the performance and the reactions of the audience than others, hence Sarah's dissatisfaction with the group's emphasis on ideas and Kate's constant pushing for the reworking of particular scenes. Although I could not help but feel that the paying audience was of little importance to all of them, Today's main performance was for themselves. The audience at a performance was important in that their approval and loud applause would have made them feel all the more successful, and going down badly brought undeniable strains to the group, but this could always be accepted because any one show was only part of a process which could be reworked at any time; or else could be written off as a lack of understanding of their avante-garde style.

Their criticisms of the group's work tended to be expressed in private rather than at rehearsals so that changes in the way of working were limited but, more importantly, the show at least went on, whereas had any one seriously challenged the emphasis on

process, or choice of Nicki as lead, then arguments might have ensued which would have made creating for themselves more difficult. I felt that whilst politically and artistically the group were not united in their approach, that they at least managed to successfully create an organisation for themselves with fine sounding rhetoric and maintained this organisation as an end in itself. The experimentation with ideas and politics was useful experience in itself and enjoyable, and presenting this to an audience was simply part of the fiction of their organisation rather than the aim of their work.

I felt that whilst in critical terms, judging from the audience reaction and the reviews they had not succeeded in presenting a creative interpretation of the Brecht, that in interactional terms they had been highly creative, creating and maintaining an organisation for themselves. They had succeeded in creating an alternative theatre group and sustained a fiction to themselves that they were living their politics even when their experiences reflected to the contrary, as the following chapters show in more detail.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PUTTING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

In the previous chapter I concentrated on the Today Theatre Company as a group of actors interpreting the creative process. An essential ingredient of which was the collective sharing out of the organisational tasks in order to realise the creative potential in all the group's members. Collectivism was the major expression of their political beliefs and criticism of traditional theatre in practice, and this needs to be considered in some depth.

In this chapter I shall therefore look at the setting up of the collective from the perspective of the group members, consider the definitions they give to collectivism and the effects this has on the collective in practice. I shall argue that whilst they were committed to collectivism in principle, it was an ideal that was not always realized in practice, and shall suggest that their lack of collectivism stemmed paradoxically from a desire to save the fiction of the collective for themselves. Hence the performance became not the operation of a collective, but of sustaining interpretations of events which maintained the fiction of their organisation for them. In Chapter Four I suggested that their creativity lay not in their official function as a theatre group putting on a performance of Brecht, but in creating a fiction of an experimental group for themselves. In this chapter

I shall look at the workings of this performance by looking at their definitions of collectivism and accounts of their experience in the group.

Creativity is a concept, which like creativity, is subject to a variety of different interpretations by various groups and individuals, who will each base their collective organisation and behaviour within it, on the meaning the concept has for them. The starting point for understanding behaviour within a collective organisation must therefore rest with the definitions of collectivism from the view point of the organisational members. However, before looking at the various definitions of the Today collective I should like to briefly outline my own interpretation of the concept.

A collective refers to a particular style of working rather than a style of ownership. It ideally involves a process of sharing power, responsibility and commitment; and in some cases remuneration, on an equal level between all the members of the collective. It is a style of working which involves reaching decisions through consensus, which encourages the active participation of all the organisation in the decision making processes, and this ensures a high level of commitment to realising the decisions that have been reached. There are thus no status, power or income differences, although a collective may have task specialisations or an equal sharing of all the work load.

Rothschild-Witt (1979) defines the collective organisation as ideally democratic organisations which fulfil social needs without recourse to bureaucratic authority. Decisions, she argues, become authoritative for the group members to the extent that they derive from a process in which all members have the right to full and equal participation. They are reached through a process of consensus whereby all members have participated in the formulation of the problem and negotiation of the decision.

Collectives, she argues, seek to minimise rules, and rely on personalistic and moralistic appeals to provide control within the group. This is facilitated by the group selecting members who share their basic values and world view. Thus members are often recruited on the basis of friendship and socio-political values, which helps foster the idea of community within the group. Demystification of specialised knowledge, abolition of the division of labour and egalitarianism are the central features of the collective organisation. These processes are all aimed at facilitating the sharing of power, the sharing of work, and the sharing of knowledge, thus enabling equality in the organisational process.

The collective organisation involves a process of working whereby members are recruited often on their understanding of, and their commitment to working collectively. Their success as an organisation will depend on their attitudes towards one another and their perception of collectivism, as well as the task

effectiveness of their group. It is an organisational process which cannot be taken-for-granted by its membership who will then concentrate on the task they have joined together to complete, because they have chosen to work in a particular way which requires conscious consideration and must be considered alongside the official purpose of the group.

It is many ways an "alternative" organisational process and so members cannot fall back on customary ways of working which are often inappropriate for collectives, because they involve experiences of hierarchy, competition and control, which foster individualism rather than co-operation and consensus. This very newness of style which may make collectivism an attractive alternative to more traditional organisational approaches, also requires a more conscious approach towards the organisation which is time and effort consuming, particularly in its early stages until the members become accustomed to the approach.

By this I mean that collectivism cannot come about by goodwill alone. The members of a collective must be committed to collective processes of power and decision sharing through active discussion sessions, rather than assume it is a style of working which once accepted by its members can be taken-for-granted as being in operation. Its very essence is that it is a participative process rather than a passive acquiescence to ones position in a hierarchy for example.



Because collectives require a conscious commitment and ongoing practice, their success will be determined largely by the definitions given to the organisation by its members, and the meaning they give to the processes they experience during it. In order to understand the attitudes and motivations towards the collective it is essential therefore that we understand:

*"The subjective meaning attached to typical actions and to their intended consequences for the involvements of the actors, for their perceived place in the organisation, and for the stability of the common set of expectations within which they interact."*

(Silverman 1970)

The Today Theatre Company was set up by two members of the collective, Nicki and Barbara, who had worked together previously in a group which presented *"collectively devised critical performances in unusual settings."*

They both had directing and performing experience and decided on the basis of this to set up an experimental theatre collective for a one-year project. They describe their work as:

*"Its a crazy project. It is out of the blue. We wrote to some people like Suzanne in New York to do it. The first idea of a feminist theatre doing theatre that isn't really theatre*

*and having a tour. You can be in a company for many of us without auditions - we created ourselves."*

The collective was formed largely through personal relationships, that is, people with whose work Nicki and Barbara were familiar. They had seen some of Dave's work whilst they were students at Oxford and admired his acting. Nicki and Terry had met briefly at Oxford and arranged to work in a clowning street theatre together for the summer, and so Terry was invited to join the group. Kath was recommended through a friend of Barbara's whilst Sarah was invited to leave Time Life magazine and join the group by Barbara who had seen some of her work previously. Sarah's account of how she came to join the group is typical of the informal way that the group was formed through loose friendship networks:

*I went to Harvard and then came over to England to work as a freelance writer for Time Life. I met Barbara through my boyfriend at Oxford where I saw some of her performances. I liked how they were done and was intrigued by her work. Barbara saw me perform and contacted me in New York and asked if I'd like to join Today. I didn't know it was going to be a collective, but I didn't like Time Life, and I was intrigued by her work. She sent me a copy of The Silver Veil and I really liked it so I decided to give up my job and come over."*

Initially the group was set up with little planning or thought. People were invited to join the company on the basis that they would fit in with the ethos of the group, though, as Barbara herself acknowledged, this was itself rather unclear:

*"What we originally thought with this collective was maybe to find a way of combining director plus collective in a sense that if it was The Silver Veil then I would come in with a basic general design for it, and then we would work on it collectively."*

The only firm decisions that were reached were that the group would work for one year, with some notion of collectivism, though how this would operate was uncertain on two plays, The Silver Veil, chosen by Barbara, and In the Jungle of Cities, chosen by Nicki. As a collective of six they then advertised for two more members to join the group, though how clear they were of their ideas even at this stage was uncertain. Stacey and Leam the newcomers differed slightly in their perception of how well developed the company's ideas were at this stage, but both felt unable to contribute as they were newcomers. Stacey felt that she had been selected to join the group after most of the major decisions had been made:

*"Leam and I, you know, were the two people who auditioned, everybody else was, well they weren't from the start, but everybody was invited, and was in the group, so the company*

*had sort of established its manifesto or whatever, its ideas, before I auditioned for it."*

Leam felt that he couldn't join in with the early discussions of the company's manifesto because he had been a recruited member:

*"Along with Stacey we were the only two who auditioned to join the group. At first this made me feel that the others were more powerful, but we were collective in that we shared commitment and equal responsibility. I couldn't share in the statement of company policy very easily, but I contributed to the advertising at the time."*

It would seem that time was spent as a group of eight developing a policy on creativity, containing the notion of process and the need for collective working, but that what this meant organisationally was never clearly talked through. I felt that when they discussed their approach to creativity they would all put forward their group response, their official manifesto of process and challenge to conventional theatre, whereas when they talked about collectivism there was a far wider range of responses as data contained in this chapter will reveal. This is not to suggest that they all shared the same definition of creativity, which as the last chapter demonstrated was clearly not the case, but that they talked more about creativity as a group than they did about the collective process and what that involved for them.

I tried to establish why the various group members joined a collective and thus hopefully establish their understanding of collectivism and their motivation towards the group. I hoped to gain some insight into the various members' frames of reference which they brought with them to the group, and upon which they based their definitions of situations within the company.

Their motives for joining the group were quite varied. For some it provided the opportunity to act and that it was a collective was incidental, Suzanne was not even aware of the fact, but liked The Silver Veil as her previous comments indicated. Others wanted the political experience of working collectively whilst some sought the opportunity to experiment theatrically which this project would supply.

Both Stacey's and Sarah's reasons for joining Today were expressed more in terms of their love for acting than through a desire to work collectively which is noticeable by its absence in their reasons for joining the group. This is an important point when one considers the need of a collective for all its members to understand collectivism and be committed to collective processes for it to work. Stacey referred to the opportunity provided by Today to commit herself to acting which she loved, and had even dropped out of University to pursue acting more fully:

*"I was just basically involved in plays all the time. I was very active . I just kind of went from play to play and tried*

*to shove in essays between times. I just thought that if I was going to be at University I should be more committed and if I wanted to act I should go all the way with it."*

Similarly Sarah loved drama and tragedy in particular. She was working for Time Life in New York and didn't particularly like her work, and so when Barbara sent her an invitation to join the company along with a copy of The Silver Veil which she "really liked" , she decided to give up her job and come over. She would talk in strong emotional terms about The Silver Veil, describing it as a "*pure and idealistic, delicate, beautiful magical thing.*" She joined the company to perform The Silver Veil and stayed with them despite an antipathy towards their style of working and dislike for the Brecht which they were to perform later. She felt that the group had a far too intellectual approach to theatre and preferred a more intuitive approach to plays. She thus spoke out in rehearsals, preferring to improvise an idea, and paid little attention to politics and collective participation:

*"In any other rehearsals I've been in, in any other company, we've talked things out so much, but would get on our feet and we'd play, and that 's where I think best in theatre, otherwise I get all sorts of blocks. For me the more thoughts there are in my head the more constricted I feel. I think you can try and act out too many ideas, whereas the way I act is by instinct, what feels right for me."*

Sarah it would seem felt an antipathy towards the style of working on the play chosen by the group which she failed to raise despite the consequences for the collective. This meant first of all, that they were not operating within rehearsals on the basis of consensus as Sarah was opposed to the intellectual approach, and secondly, by her choosing to quietly get on with her work and concentrate on her acting intuitively, she "opted out" of her collective responsibilities, putting the task of performance as a paramount consideration. This quiet opting-out stretched beyond the rehearsals to other areas of the creative process, partly through a self-fulfilling prophecy that the others now expected her to be quiet and did not consider her opinions, and often expressed irritation when she spoke out; and partly because she did not take the notion of the creative process as seriously as her performance:

*"What is most important for me is performing. That's what I care about most. If I have a day and I have three things to do, like I have administration to do, and other things to do, but if I really feel exhausted, and if I feel if I do all these things I'll give a bad performance, then I won't do those things. Because that to me is what makes me happy, is giving a good performance."*

Her remarks contrast markedly with Nicki's approach to the work. He is very much in favour of the notion of process and

tries to overcome the hostility he senses towards administration from other members of the group:

*"I don't want administration to be a chore, and acting to be a pleasure, so let's not rush it out of the way in two hours. We'll go on to seven if necessary."*

Sarah's hostility towards the intellectual approach of the group was not shared by all its members. Dave, in fact, felt that the wordiness and emphasis on meaning demonstrated the seriousness of their approach to their work. I told him one day that:

*"It sometimes strikes me that you're a group of Middle-Class, Oxbridge, English Lit graduates being very clever for the sake of it."*

To which he replied:

*"That can be a criticism and also a compliment to the way we work. It is a pretentious group sometimes and it rankles me a bit. A woman can leave the stage and we will see this as the triumph of women over men, whilst the audience will see that a character has left the stage. We can be a bit pretentious, but it also clarifies things for us, we accept that the audience want to see that. It's also a tribute to the seriousness with which we take things, and that actions mean things. Actions have implications. Thoroughness and*



*integrity in the group is one of our main strengths. It is a political thing not a middle class thing."*

Dave talked of the importance of joining the group for the political satisfaction he gained:

*"It fits in with my notion of politics - the way I'd like to see the world organised."*

Sentiments echoed by Terry who referred to:

*"The knowledge that this is much better in political terms than most of the other things one could be doing."*

There seems to be a marked contrast in language emerging between Terry and Dave who refer to political satisfaction, integrity, world organisation, and Stacey and Sarah who refer to their delight in acting, a love of tragedy and performing, which I believe reflected a different approach towards the group and to their work.

Kath joined the group because it was a collective and would thus provide valuable experience at a personal level. The collectivism was for her an end in itself rather than an example which she hoped to propagandize to the outside world, which may have differed from other members of the group who hoped to convince others of their ideal:

*"I wanted to work better collectively. To get better at give and take really. I never joined this group with the idea that I was going to change the way audiences looked at theatre, or that this project was going to materially change anything in the outside world at all. It changes things for us eight, and it changes perhaps the ways in which we can work in the future."*

Barbara was interested in the control over her work provided by a collective which provided the opportunity to experiment in areas outside acting within the creative process, and to experiment theatrically with different techniques. Collectivism was therefore an important principle for her, but more in terms of the personal satisfaction, than in the wider political sense:

*"I've already gained a lot of experience in administration, in calling people together, and in performance - things that I could not get in the way that would be this satisfying, although it is very unrewarding financially - things that I could not get if I were just attached to another company. I could never get to do as much and learn as much as I have in this company."*

Yet she also referred to the opportunity this project enabled them to :

*"....provide magnificent entertainment; to write our own stuff; to perform and direct ourselves; to gain a lot of experience in administration in calling people together and in performance."*

There were a wide variety of motivations towards joining the group, some reflecting differing political perspectives, or varying expectations of the collective organisation, though some seemed to reflect the opportunities to work provided by the group, the collectivism being incidental. Some variation in expectations is inevitable as people will bring different experiences and opinions to the collective which will often enrich the organisation. However, to recruit members who have very little understanding of collectivism and what it involves can undermine the whole way of working.

The members were recruited as Rothschild-Witt (1979) suggests, on the basis of informal friendship networks, but they seemed, by their own account, more concerned with the acting skills of the members than with their collective commitment, and did not seem to discuss the issue of collective working and what this would involve for them in practice, but as I suggested earlier, concentrated more on the abstract notion of how this would affect their creativity and present an alternative to establishment theatre. I never saw them discuss their relationships towards one another as members of a collective, or the dynamics of their work

process throughout the entire period I spent with them , which did not help them to raise their consciousness of collectivism.

When I talked to group members about the meaning of collectivism I sensed, as the following remarks will show, that it was an ideal to be stated, part of their official group ideology, but less important in practice as a system of equal participation and power. Collectivism was expressed in terms of its effects on creativity and sharing of responsibility which created a definitional vacuum in which powerful individuals could emerge to dominate the group.

Stacey regarded the collective as providing an opportunity to work in a friendly environment in which she could develop her own ideas. She refers to a situation of:

*"Not having a director , not working out someone else's ideas, but having space for your own ideas."*

It was seen as an opportunity to develop ideas and rework traditional notions of creativity. Terry comments that:

*"It's a challenge to conventional theatre working collectively, you know, it's a challenge from any angle, from a director's or a performer's angle, or someone experienced as a director or someone experienced as an actress."*

The collective was seen to be more creative because it could provide a pool of talents rather than earmark roles for the "expert" and because everyone could participate and develop their creative potential as a group.

Barbara felt that the best aspect of collectivism was the opportunity it provided to bring out the best skills in everyone:

*"I think the ideal thing, the ideal direction a collective should ideally work in, is in bringing out the best skills of each person, and bringing out the best of them."*

Her sentiments were echoed by Terry who informed me that a collective was a far more creative organisation than a directed one because the actors could all put forward their interpretations of the text. Thus presumably at a purely personal level there was a greater opportunity to develop one's creative potential:

*"It's more creative in a collective. In producing a play with a director they have the idea and even if they ask for opinions they come chronologically after the director's, therefore they still frame the presentation."*

However, when I talked about his experiences within the group he admitted to the personal struggle he had faced as a performer used to being creative on stage, having to express his creativity elsewhere than the performance. He defends this situation as the

following extracts from our interview show, arguing that the group have reworked their definition of creativity to a concentration on process. I would like to suggest that there is a struggle in his mind between his experiences as a performer, his ideals for the collective and his experience within the group which is conveyed in the following discussion:

Sue: *What ar the problems you've overcome in the group?*

Terry: *Difficulties in The Silver Veil I've encountered have been to do with not knowing what style of acting the production required, of finding new style of acting which I didn't really succeed in and I was having to be satisfied with an expression of creativity in areas other than performance. Definitely getting used to my creativity being expressed in rehearsals, in discussions, but not actually in performance - but for me as primarily a performer it's been work to come to terms with that.*

And later on I asked him:

Sue: *What does creativity mean to you?*

Terry: *My first response to that is it's a daft question. Expression of imagination and the conflict of that with the environment.*

Sue: *What do you mean?*

Terry: *It may seem very pedestrian, but one has an idea of an atmosphere that one wants to create and that arises from imagination and blocking, the mechanics of that inagination. Lighting again is the mechanics of that operation and not generally recognised as such.*

Sue: *Is the process then very different form the product?*

Terry: *Process is the important work, theatre is orientated towards product, you're not encouraged to think about anything else but the product that arrives vacuum packed, so that any intrusion of mechanics is regarded as really heinous - so fluffing lines is regarded with horror because you've destroyed the magic illusion.*

Sue: *Does the product matter?*

Terry: *There'd be no point in having a totally unoppressive way of having a show if what we presented was boring.*

Sue: *Do you think your work is more creative then than traditional theatre?*

Terry: *It doesn't seem to be correct to be using those terms of comparison. I find traditional theatre boring, it's false*

*- it ignores the basic facts of its operation. I feel it isn't real because it hasn't considered something.*

Terry's remarks epitomise the struggle between their ideal of presenting process, the need to entertain the audience and the difficulties in finding a new way of working and being creative, faced by the group. This was a complicated series of objectives they set themselves particularly as they were a new group, and didn't fully understand collectivism or the emphasis on process.

There seemed to be more certainty within the group over the reasons for choosing to work as a collective, and the effects this ought to have on the creative process, than there was over the workings of a collective in practice. When I asked them what collectivism had meant in practice they tended to refer to shared commitment and responsibility rather than equal involvement in decision making processes:

*"You just have to have that complete commitment to it, and that's the only reason I think it's working, because we all want it to work, and are doing our best to try and make it work."*

*"We all work as hard even if we don't lead the group. The commitment is all equal. There is no such thing as one person puts more in."*



They justified inequalities in the decision-making processes by referring to collectives as equalling commitment, and yet completely overlooked their lack of commitment to The Jungle because it was a decision imposed upon them from the outset of the group. They seemed defensive about Nicki's domination within the group rather than be prepared to challenge it. Leam defended his domination as unimportant because they were always able to contribute to rehearsals, and yet later in a private conversation, confided in me that he didn't always feel free to say what we thought.

He initially told me that:

*The responsibility is equally shared. I feel OK if Nicki is saying a lot as long as I'm switched on and ready to respond. You can't pretend everyone is as talented as everyone else. The important thing is that no-one is riding on anyone else's work. People are always given the opportunity to contribute as many ideas as Nicki and Barbara. She is the other guiding influence in the play. I got a rehearsal space fixed up, bookings and performed as much as anyone else and felt I took my share of the responsibility."*

However, in a later interview he admitted that:

*"Even within my own ideal as a collective it doesn't work for me. I can't always say things others would find acceptable."*

*I have fantasies of people saying how can you be so right-wing, or when Nicki writes people off. I don't relate to that kind of talk, and worry if I say something I might be written off."*

Leam has made two interesting points, firstly that he didn't contribute as many ideas in rehearsals as Nicki and Barbara, and secondly that he didn't always feel able to do so. Coupled with Terry's remark about finding his creativity outside performance, some contradiction seems to be emerging between their perceived idea of collective directing and their experience of it. Some of this seemed to rest in Nicki's dominance over the group.

Nicki, in my opinion, felt that he worked much harder than anyone else in the group and would adopt an air of pained tolerance at meetings which made others find him unapproachable. He would, on occasions, walk into rehearsals and snap at the rest of the group because he felt that they weren't working hard enough. One day this exploded into an argument as Dave shouted back at him. I asked Stacey about this row, but she tried to defend Nicki's actions as best she could:

*"He has a lot of energy, he's very work orientated and he gets annoyed when other people don't concentrate on work, and I think people get annoyed with him for trying to move things in one direction all the time. Dave was annoyed at that."*

*"But surely", I asked, "people seemed to be working."*

*"They were", she replied, "that's why Dave got annoyed with him. It's something that has happened before so I feel you can get annoyed with him for being like that."*

Stacey makes an important point that not only does Nicki get unjustifiably angry with the group, more importantly, he tries to push them in one direction all the time - his. He, in particular, I felt was most at home with the emphasis on analysis rather than performance. He loved looking again and again for new meanings in the text. Jokes were made about him *"Being heavily into semiology, if you get my meaning."* He would encourage brainstorming a scene, but once an idea was settled upon to use within that particular scene, rather than work on it and develop everyone's performance, he would push onto another scene and another brainstorming session, with him generally playing a central role in the throwing up of ideas.

He would move people onto a new scene before they were happy with the situation before them. This gave rise to feelings of powerlessness within the group. Sarah spoke to me of the absence of any control over their work individually or as a group:

*"I think it is something that a lot of us feel, you get a feeling that things are going on and there's no control. You even get a feeling that no-one has control and there's nothing*

*you can do about it, it just seems like we have to do a scene in a certain way and none of us are excited."*

Whilst Kath told me that:

*"We feel committed to a style that we don't feel part of sometimes. That we're doing things that....Sometimes you think, what is this? What's going on? I don't feel like I understand this or like I want to do this."*

As I mentioned in the last chapter, this lack of rigour was not seen as a problem by anyone during The Silver Veil because the nature of the play was completely different. It did not require pacing and control, but an intuitive feeling, an emotion and group cohesion rather than discipline and control. The Silver Veil was liked by all the group, whereas The Jungle was generally disliked and was more suited to their emphasis on ensemble working and organic development.

The different requirements of the two plays aesthetically demanded different dramatic approaches by the group. The Silver Veil did not need formal directing, whilst the emphasis on style and pace in The Jungle required far more discipline. As a collective they had a responsibility to be sensitive to the demands of their material, but whilst these different needs were perceived by individuals within Today, they stuck to their

original manifesto, despite the clash it produced with the needs of the text.

Kath described The Jungle as:

*"....more of a conventional play, and more of a play where we have to say, 'now you move here at this point', we have to block it more."*

She also argued that:

*"We've got a different job to do. In The Silver Veil we didn't need such constant criticism of the way things were done. We tended to find, we quickly found ways of performing, and in this [The Jungle] we can find the ways of performing, but it's all in the execution of it. Can you actually keep the pace throughout the scene is what it relies on, and in that sense it is more truly theatrical than The Silver Veil."*

There was obviously a need to alter their working style between the two plays which was never done. They had a notion of how they would work based on discussions at the outset of the group's formation, no doubt with The Silver Veil borne in mind. They performed this very successfully and more importantly, very happily, and yet with the work on The Jungle started to run into problems. With the onset of a new play they should have looked at the needs of the play and what they wanted to do with it, and then

decide how they could best go about it. They failed to discuss the choice of the play, whether the group were committed to performing it, or whether their style of working was suitable for it or not.

One of the benefits of collectivism is supposedly their flexibility, they are concerned with re-evaluation and process. Rothschild-Witt (1979) argues that a distinguishing characteristic of collectives is that members assumptions and their decisions are not permanent, and be easily changed - a situation she refers to as a 'transitory orientation'. There is none of the bureaucratic red tape to prevent change which can happen in large organisations steeped in rules and a sense of hierarchy.

Here we have a situation where no-one in Today challenged the choice of plays or raised openly that the style of working was unsuitable and should be reconsidered within their own system of ideas. There seemed to be an emergence of dissatisfaction with the play and with the group, and yet no-one was openly discussing any of these issues.

Some of the group were vehement in their dislike of the Brecht, Sarah described it as:

*"An extremely ugly play, when I first read it I couldn't latch onto it, there is nothing in it I appreciated. I don't sympathise with Schlink and Garga. I think that it's a*

*filthy, rotten relationship and I don't worship hardness, I don't think hardness is a wonderful thing."*

Even more interestingly she concluded this outburst by admitting that:

*"I don't really enjoy performing it either."*

Kath had similar views, she told me that:

*"I just don't have the emotional and ideological commitment to this work. It is say much less and is written with much less real emotion. I suppose Aspasijia knew what she was doing. I don't think Brecht did, except that he was writing a play which he wanted to be good. Really when you get down to it I don't have much respect for Brecht."*

It seemed paradoxical that people had spoken to me of the benefits of collectivism and yet when pushed about their experiences of the collective a scenario of lack of control, lack of understanding and general dissatisfaction started to emerge. When I spoke to Sarah in September, eight months after the formation of the group, she stated openly that:

*"Most of still don't understand how decisions are made."*

I asked her how she felt about working in the collective as she replied:

*"I felt OK about it in The Silver Veil because of my love for Aspasia, whereas I felt extremely frustrated in The Jungle of Cities because our whole approach to it was intellectual, none of us loved the play, if you see what I mean. I thought we had to force ourselves to work much more in The Jungle than The Silver Veil. I found that a lot of the decisions that were made, were not a process of responding to agreement but rather a process of suppressing your disagreement."*

By suppressing their disagreement over the pacing of rehearsals and over the choice of the play, they surrendered their role in the processes of decision making and organisation. I, at first, wondered whether they saw Nicki dominating events or not, but as the following comments show they were obviously aware of this and felt resentful towards him.

Dave commented that:

*"I often get annoyed with Nicki - everybody does. He's certain tendencies to put himself above the rest of us. He thinks he's a better director and has better ideas, but he's not as good an actor as the rest of us."*



Even Barbara who was a co-founder with Nicki, and herself a forceful member of the group told me that she found him to be far more dominant in this group than when they had worked together previously.

*"There is something about this collective, this project and his own development as a person that has made him rather bossy at times. I haven't seen him like that elsewhere....It seems to me that he thinks very much in terms of HIM and US. When he says WE, he doesn't actually mean WE, he means YOU."*

Nicki saw himself as a powerful member of the group but felt that this was acceptable within the collective:

*"That I am powerful as a man matters. Personality is one of the factors that you have to deal with in a collective. I feel it is gradually changing, it's better than when we started, but it will never be resolved. It's false to imagine that you have to eradicate differences of personality - you must create a democracy using them. There are limits to how far I'll subdue my own personality traits because some are skills. They are not necessarily virtues but they are definitely skills."*

The group seemed to be caught in a vicious circle. Because only the two founder members chose the plays to be performed and because this was never questioned, the group found themselves

working on a play for which they had very little commitment. This meant that they contributed fewer ideas in rehearsals which enabled Nicki to dominate events. This was never challenged partly because the collective was seen in terms of shared commitment rather than shared power; and partly because Nicki's domination was structurally supported through his role as founder member and selector of the play. Whilst people complained about the play, and about Nicki they never chose to use the opportunity that collectivism should supply to raise these issues. This was because either they didn't fully understand what collectivism as a style of working involved in practice, or because they chose not to in order to continue working on the production in the short time they had made available for themselves.

SECTION FOUR

**A CRITICAL REVIEW**

A final word

In this thesis so far, I have presented the reader with the theoretical framework taken with me to the research setting; outlined the performance of the research process itself; and highlighted part of the text taken from this interaction, namely the Today Theatre Company's accounts of their creativity and their collectivism. Carrying on with this theatrical metaphor, I should like in this section to present a critical review and analysis of Today's performance.

I shall, therefore, develop in more detail the notion of a 'fictional reality' which has constituted part of the backdrop to the research performance as a whole, along with the concepts of audience, subtext and creative process. I shall make the relationship between these ideas more explicit, and present the reader with a theory of behaviour drawing upon these various concepts, which help to unravel many of the paradoxes and contradictions in Today's behaviour.

It is a theory which draws upon, and develops out of, the interactionist perspective by recognizing the importance of interpretive processes and the subjectivity of any view of one's own or another's behaviour. It does, however, redress some of the weaknesses of interactionism outlined in Chapter Two, and adds to the interactionist perspective another view of human behaviour. I shall argue in this section, therefore, that if one interprets the meanings implicit within an account, rather than accept the

explicit content of the other's behaviour, one can interpret behaviour more creatively. The creative capacity of interactants enables them to create fictions for themselves as well as for others as in the case of impression management. These fictions constituting a separate layer of reality from that recognized by interactionists as a subjective interpretation of reality. It is a created layer of reality, maintained through tacit processes rather than an internalized view of the world. It is thus not simply a theory of social construction of reality, but considers an additional layer of reality which recognizes the creativity of the human being and adds another possibility to our interpretation of events.

In Chapter Six, therefore, I draw upon the notion of the subtext in order to analyse the meanings implicit within Today's actions, and argue that not all their statements can be accepted at face value, but more importantly, constitute part of a fiction which can be interpreted by the researcher, as an audience to the performance, as they wish. I thus draw upon various contradictions in their behaviour and in their accounts of their experience in the group, and create an interpretation of events and a new fiction for the reader to consider.

In Chapter Seven, I develop the concept of the fictional reality in more detail and in so doing draw upon the various ideas running throughout the thesis, I avoid making any final conclusions because this section represents simply the starting

point of a new fiction rather than the definitive statement of Today's behaviour. It is an interpretation of events and is part of the creative process of the research cycle subject to the critical review of the reader themselves. I have already stated earlier in this thesis that knowledge is a subjective process, and so when presenting the reader with my interpretation of events, I am presenting an interpretation of a performance, and so creating another. I am like the actor who interprets the text and presents this on stage for the audience's appreciation. I hope the reader will enter into this performance and consider some of the fresh insights into human behaviour provided for them, and recognize the value of the theatrical metaphor for understanding behaviour.

## CHAPTER SIX

### HOLDING THE GROUP TOGETHER

*"Spectators come to the theatre to hear the subtext. They can read the text at home."*

(Stanislavsky 1963)

In the introduction to this thesis I warned the reader that the conceptual base used throughout was that of the theatrical metaphor. I argued that the essence of interaction is the actor's ability to interpret meanings explicit within a situation, and those inherent within a performance, even where they contradicted one another. From this interpretive process a fiction is created for an audience who will in turn interpret the presentation before them.

Theatre, and research involve a heightening of the interpretive process and communication of the experience for a particular audience. Consequently, to present a series of actors' accounts gathered during the fieldwork experience is not enough, as this simply provides the reader with a raw text. The creative process within research involves the researcher in interpreting the meanings implicit within these accounts, bringing the subtext to life, and presenting a fiction of their own to the reader, as well as that of the subjects under study.

In this chapter I shall present my interpretation of events as they unfolded in the fieldwork performance. I shall draw upon my own experience of observations and interviews and present an account of these. I do not always accept statements made by the Today Theatre Group about their behaviour in themselves, but place an emphasis more on their reasons for making them, and in doing so, unravel the mysteries of the subtext, thus creating a fiction of my own. This chapter therefore constitutes a presentation of my interpretation of the Today story as a sequel to their accounts in the previous two chapters.

In the last two chapters a picture emerged of contradictions between the idealism and of experiences of the Today Theatre Group in trying to put their ideals into practice. During the period of time I spent with the group I noticed what appeared to be a growing dissatisfaction with both the nature of the work and with its organisation amongst the members of the collective. In this chapter I shall explain why I felt it was that, despite the enormous source of potential conflict, the group's relations were characterised more by petty squabbles, and tense silences rather than open confrontation and hostility. I shall explain how a high level of personal conflict is often characteristic of collectives, and yet was feared by Today, who avoided any potentially damaging, or even possibly constructive, confrontations, and thus despite numerous sources of tension were characterised more by an avoidance of conflict than its manifestation.



I shall argue that the group developed a "fictional reality" to define away the seeds of conflict within the group, and maintain an internal cohesion despite the numerous difficulties they faced, thus protecting their major fiction, the group itself, which they had created for themselves rather than as a means for putting on performances. The performance may be seen more a part of their fiction than an outlet for their talents as actors. I shall argue that the staging of the play was performed for the group primarily as an audience to its own fiction, than for the official, paying audience in the theatre.

In order to support this argument I shall consider their contrasting accounts of events, and give meanings to the contradictions which emerged. I shall look at the difficulties faced by the group trying to realise their ideals of an holistic creative process, and suggest how an awareness of being an "alternative" institution created by the group as an expression of their ideals, made the appearance of success, for themselves all the more important. I shall argue that paradoxically when faced by problems within the collective, they chose to sacrifice collectivism in practice, in order to save it as an ideal. Rather than risk dangerous confrontations when they were overworked and exhausted they "defined away" the collective participation in the running of the group, or choosing of a play, and enabled their fiction of a collective experimental theatre group to be maintained. Their creativity was channelled more into creating

and maintaining the organisation for itself, than for the official task of putting on a performance.

Part of maintaining their organisation involved avoiding confrontations which might jeopardise the group's existence and consequently as I suggested above, ideals had to be compromised or defined away. For example, we saw in the last chapter, collectivism defined as shared responsibility rather than shared power, creating a definitional vacuum in which one member of the group, Nicki, could dominate events. Thus a fictional reality was developed at one level as a social cohesive which overcame the separation between their idealism and their experience. A variety of layers of fictions were created ranging from this definition of collectivism, to 'maintaining' myths within the group, which tended to locate the blame for their tension within the text, rather than their behaviour towards one another, thus protecting the fiction of their group for themselves.

I shall argue that the maintenance of fictional realities is more of a tacit than a conscious process. It involves the maintenance of fictions which must not be questioned by any of the group, or indeed by the researcher. In my case this involved me in a complex role as an unwitting participant in the fiction, as well as acting as an audience to their fiction, whilst simultaneously having to create a fiction of my own. The fictional realities can be either defensive myths or more creative products built upon layers of these fictions, such as the

group itself, all of which rest on unspoken assumptions with the actor as the primary audience to their own fiction.

A fictional reality has to be plausible enough for an actor to unquestioningly maintain without it becoming an obvious part of their own subjective interpretation of reality. It is not, however, a cynical attempt to mislead outsiders, because the actors are more concerned with avoiding unwanted realities and creating more desirable fictions for themselves, than to present a desirable impression of self to others. In this case the fictional realities enable the group to maintain the fiction of their alternative organisation reflecting the creative process collectively in all areas of their work.

When I first started my research with Today they presented themselves as a tightly knit organisation which, they argued, would develop organically through a work process based on a collective commitment to all stages of the creative process. However, as rehearsals progressed from an exploration of ideas, to a supposed concentration on the final product, I noticed an increase in tension between the group's members which grew worse when they went on tour. Here they would argue over a range of subjects from the staging of props to future tour plans, resigned to the fact that nothing could ever be a straightforward issue.

There was eventually a situation by the end of the tour where members of the group hardly spoke to one another outside of

meetings, and would even sit together in a house in Bristol all sullenly ignoring one another. Within meetings discussion was kept to a minimum for fear of causing an argument. They were prepared to grudgingly submit to those most prepared to push their case, rather than discuss a range of ideas and try to reach a collective consensus. Kath, aware of this breakdown in the group tried to challenge this situation at a morning meeting stating that:

*"The collective isn't working well at the moment - decisions seem to be made arbitrarily by two or three people agreeing on something, or by the strength of will of one person. We can't defend how we decide upon anything, there seems no logic to it."*

Despite this open challenge to the group about its relationships and style of working, no-one chose to pursue her remarks for a discussion on the strained atmosphere amongst them, but instead Nicki closed the comment down with the scathing remark that:

*"It is unfortunate that you haven't really liked the three decisions taken so far."*

It is quite remarkable that a collective whose process should depend upon consensus could let such a situation occur without a challenge. In the last chapter we saw people reluctant to participate in collective directing, explaining this away as a

non-issue because they shared the responsibility for the group. Here the situation is different because the members were consciously silencing themselves to avoid conflict, and reduce what Barbara called:

*"The claustrophobia of having to get eight people to agree on something."*

I noticed that disagreements which could seriously threaten the group were avoided, and that tensions would blow up instead over a trivial issue. One night, after a bad performance, for instance, they shrugged off the more threatening audience criticisms through their after show camaraderie, but when it came to decide upon how they would all get home they had a furious row over who was to use the car and who would walk or take a taxi. This resulted in Stacey walking off on her own and with me joining her, where she confessed to being *"sick and tired of the whole group"* and how they were behaving.

Her behaviour was typical of the rest of the group who, despite refusing to face the tension as a group, would all recognise in private that something was going wrong. One afternoon I accidentally met up with two of the women from the group in an art centre in Bristol. They were bemoaning the state of the production and the relations within the group. They both sat with me over coffee plotting a "spontaneous" outburst for the next

rehearsal to try and get a change in the performance in spite of what they called:

*"Nicki's increasing reluctance to make any change."*

Another occasion where I gained access to their dissatisfaction was on a shopping errand where Kath admitted that they were working "really badly", and yet when I tried to push her for the causes of this situation she seemed reluctant to accept the group's responsibility for any of its problems. Like the rest of the group she would blame exhaustion and the alienating effects of the text rather than discuss the unfair distribution of work or power within the group implicit in her criticism of Nicki above. It seemed that whilst they were prepared to make thinly veiled criticisms of the group (and then only in private), once explicitly faced with a question about their relationships the same explanations were offered which centred on the alienating effects of the play:

*"There are a lot more tensions this time than with The Silver Veil. That's all to do with all of us having been working together, and things have been getting more and more intense, because our lives are centred around this. And also its just an uglier play, its just hard and Terry was just saying, 'its ugly issues and ugly things happening'. Whereas The Silver Veil was all very positive and people working together."*

The Brecht they felt was concerned with "anti-bourgeois behaviour, showing it as sexy, manipulative and violent." It involved a concentration on power, manipulation and senseless aggression which, they argued, fostered individualism rather than collectivism, tension rather than optimism and conflict rather than empathetic understanding. It succeeded in alienating them from their work and from one another.

Their reasoning was that if the group concentrated on warmth and sharing rather than competition and aggression, they were far more likely to cooperate and develop ideas with one another than to seek domination within the group. Hence they concluded that they worked ensemble with The Silver Veil and in a fragmented individualistic manner with the Brecht.

It was a tantalising suggestion that their problems were created for them by the text which imposed alienation and individualism upon them, rather than seek the causes of their problems within their own organisational processes and relationships. Their argument was based on the assumption that if one spends a lot of time concentrating on the negative aspects of their life one will internalise this behaviour and behave accordingly, rather like Marvin, The Paranoid Android in The Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy, who having dwelt on all the worst possible aspects of life, could not be told anything new about it, and having become enormously depressed in the process, would constantly bemoan "*Life, don't talk to me about life.*"

I had to decide first of all how plausible was this explanation for their behaviour. Could the text have really created all their problems, and if so, where did this leave all their other complaints about the group? Secondly, had this explanation of the text causing their problems become a part of their subjective interpretation of reality, or not, and if not, were they trying to convince me, or themselves of this excuse for the breakdown in collectivism?

In support of this explanation they told me of the need to focus for whole days on images of violence and madness, or to work on aggression exercises to build up a feeling for the jungle of capitalist society, and that these workshops did not leave the group unaffected, I certainly witnessed some resistance from Barbara to aggression against women in the play because she felt it would influence attitudes towards women in the company.

During one session it was suggested that the powerlessness of women should be represented by limiting their spatial freedom on stage. Barbara opposed this idea arguing that:

*"Brecht's way of being anti-bourgeois is by kicking women around."*

She expressed a concern that if they start to degrade women in the play it will reduce their status in the group because:



*"It seeps into behaviour outside the rehearsal."*

Stacey similarly referred to a concern that the women were given minor roles within the Brecht, and that their treatment in their interpretation of the text was at times undesirable and could exacerbate sexual divisions within the group, by reinforcing rather than challenging attitudes felt by the men towards women in the group. She told me of a rehearsal where:

*"Barbara gets kinda pissed off with the fact that she's just being moved around, and women were being treated kind of cruelly, and that happens in rehearsals. You know, you as you get moved around, even as you're playing the character. Its just a nastier atmosphere because of the play."*

The women seemed to suggest that the men internalised some of the sexism of the play, and adopted its negative value system to the detriment of the group as a whole. This was exacerbated by the minor roles given to the women within the performance so that they had less to commit themselves to the play, and could see no evidence of positive discrimination from any of the men. It was felt that the sexism must have been brought out by the Brecht because the men acted very differently towards the women in the first play:

*"It wasn't like this with The Silver Veil. It was much better then. We were more adventurous and gave more attention to the*

women. This play is very dominated by two main characters, and everyone else is in a supporting role, the share out in The Silver Veil was much fairer."

Their comments raised the interesting hypothesis namely that rehearsing on the play, focusing on the behaviour required by the text, could create a series of oppressive attitudes which ran counter to the hopes of the group. It made the men more sexist in their dealings with the women, and the group as a whole more individualistic and competitive rather than cooperative. It need not even create new behaviour so much as release previous attitudes which they were working to change. Or it might simply be that these attitudes were present in the first play, but with the genuine enthusiasm shared by the group for The Silver Veil, and with the excitement of forming a new group and facing a fresh challenge, that potential areas of conflict were overlooked far more readily.

I should like to consider arguments for both explanations starting with the idea of the close relationship between life and text. Actors differ in the extent to which they feel it is necessary to search for characteristics of their role in themselves. Callow (1984) is quite convinced for the need to experience the character within you:

*"It's not simply a question of seeing the character, knowing who he is. Nor is it a matter of impersonation (though it can*

*help). What it needs is for you to locate him in you. Only then will the energy spring from within, instead of being externally applied, only then will you have the umbilical connection between the character and the author."*

He argues that part of the rehearsal period must involve total indulgence in the character:

*"You wade into the swamp and wallow, indulging gorging on the character's sensations."*

(Callow 1984)

Though he does emphasise that this is only one stage of the rehearsal process, and that the actor must not lose themselves in their character permanently. He describes rehearsals as:

*"A journey to the centre of the character - and back again."*

(ibid)

Stressing the important role of the director in sensing when the actor has reached their destination and is ready to come back again.

Barkworth (1980) is quite emphatic that the actor is essentially concerned with presenting themselves on stage:

*"Mostly use yourself, and change only what is necessary."*

This idea that the actor must present themselves as feeling the emotions of their character rather than simply presenting a convincing portrayal of emotion provides the cornerstone of Stanislavsky's method:

*"First of all gather the materials that have any bearing on it and supplement it with more and more imagination until you have achieved such a similarity to life that it is easy to believe in what you are doing."*

(Stanislavsky 1963)

It is apparent that some actors will try and express parts of themselves on stage which will involve finding some of the emotions or attitudes of the character in themselves and bringing these to the surface on stage. This can spill over into behaviour outside of rehearsals, as for example with Callow (1984) when he played Mozart:

*"I knew that his tempo and emotional volatility were greatly in excess of mine. As the weeks went by I began to work my own inner speed up to fever pitch. It was deeply exhausting for everyone. I ate my food twice as fast as I'd ever done, I spoke at twice the speed, darted mercurially from place to place, and at the end of the day, all but ran across Waterloo Bridge."*

However, whilst there does seem to be some evidence to suggest that actors may internalise the mood of a play, Today went to great lengths to challenge traditional theatrical norms whereby actors identified with their character and so, rather than concentrate on the portrayal of their character, they focused on the meanings implicit in the characters' actions.

Terry refers to establishment theatrical practice with a director controlling rehearsals as:

*"A false process, what's happening is you're encouraged to behave in a very individualistic manner to internalise the text and identify with your character, and in retrospect I really dislike that, I find it quite distasteful, based on a culture that is the wrong way round. In this particular play, if you were being directed, the director would work with Garga to a much greater extent than any other character. Force them to identify with Garga and go through the whole anti-hero angst bit and I think that what that person does is to say that the individual in the text is important and the individual actor has the gift to interpret the director and text. Because what is important is communication on a wider scale between people working on the text and the audience."*

Thus for the first few weeks of rehearsals they "stormed the text" collectively before casting the play to prevent an individual concentrating on their character rather than the

meaning of the play. However, this does not mean that they could not have picked up on the atmosphere of the play, they might have only distanced themselves from identifying with the characters rather than the ideas and feelings, contained within the text, and without a character to switch in and out of, might have found it less easy to separate their persona from the rehearsals. Having stormed the text and taken part in aggression workshops with a focus on creativity as an holistic process, they may have had fewer devices to protect themselves from carrying over the mood of the play than actors who concentrate on feeling their character in the play.

A second, and more straightforward argument in defence of the life and text argument is that probably some members of the group, having espoused the rhetoric of intellectualism, proceeded to continue with their work in a manner much closer to establishment theatrical practices already outlined, where the actor tries to develop an empathetic understanding of their character and bring out parts of themselves in the performance. A good example of this was provided by Sarah who, when discussing her work with me, described two contrasting approaches to acting within the group. The first I felt reflected what she felt she ought to do and the second how she behaved in practice. On the first occasion she told me how even though she would normally act through identification with a character, with Today she would always concentrate on the meanings inherent in their actions, with her past experience of acting, she said:

"You become the character and think in that character. I would never think as Sarah, I just do what the character should do and it feels right. The Jungle was intellectual acting - you knew why you were doing something. We sit and talk for three hours about something and then get up and do it. When you direct as well you think why you do something. It's not just performing a hysterical woman, it's looking at why she's hysterical and what performing this means. I really think about the part and the play. I still think as Sarah."

However, on another occasion she told me that:

"I can't accept being directed by seven other people all of whose opinions are very different, so you have to trust instinct, because what is most important for me, unlike some of the other people in the company, what is most important for me is performing. That's what I care about most."

She also told me that:

"For me the more thoughts that are in my head the more constricted I feel. I think you can try and act too many ideas, whereas the way I act is by instinct, what feels right for me."

I have already suggested in Chapter Four that members of the group attached different interpretations to the notion of process,

and would find different levels of balance between familiar acting techniques and a concern with the performance, against a concern with the creative process, emphasising the importance of the meanings inherent in the text. Thus, if the text were to generate a breakdown in collectivism it would do so for different reasons for different individuals so that accordingly, both explanations above may have some plausibility. However, whilst they may make the actors more aggressive or more anxious and tense, to suggest that the ugly issues of the play prevented them working ensemble seems rather tenuous for reasons which I shall explain below.

Firstly there is a danger of reifying the text, treating it as a living entity which can force a mood and a way of behaving on the unsuspecting actors. Secondly it suggests that they were passive receptacles to this process, whereas in fact they formed their group to try and challenge what they considered alienating tendencies in establishment theatre, and thus should have been aware of this starting to happen in their group, and more importantly, done something about it. To place the blame on the text, however, much as it may have been at the root of the problem, is not to do anything about the problem: the group had to face up to the responsibility of the breakdown in their collective and try and do something to alter the situation. The reasons why they did not do this, suggest that the cause of their problem was deeper rooted than the explanation they put forward, that is, that it was the play which caused their ills, however appealing and plausible an idea it might have been.



I think that at its worst the text can be said to have acted as a catalyst, heightening the underlying tensions already present in the group, generated by the domination of aesthetic and organisational decisions by Nicki. I felt that the ideal of process, taken very literally by the group, caused enormous strains emotionally and physically, which forced them to abandon many of their collective ideals in practice.

The holistic nature of their project, engulfing their whole lives became an increasing strain over time, as was the confusing muddle of eight people directing a scene. Having to consider the opinion of eight people over lighting, staging, costume, publicity and interpretation of the text, and then carry out responsibility for all these areas as well as put on a reasonable performance was incredibly demanding work. The sheer commitment required by members of the group became increasingly stressful as it took its toll on their personal lives. They had all given up personal relationships for the project, and with time some members started to increasingly resent this:

*"I feel like a professional, as if I'm just doing a job, whereas The Silver Veil was much more exciting - could we really do it."*

Many of their problems were caused by their holistic interpretation of process which was, I felt, encompassing to an unworkable degree, and involved the whole group in all the areas

of creativity within theatre, when often they were extremely tired and anxious about the evening's performance. However, rather than question this interpretation of process and move towards a more acceptable style of working for most of them with the exception possibly of Nicki, they chose to ignore their problems and hoped that they would disappear, or else defined them away, leaving the ideals of the organisation safely intact. The ideological purity of their notion of process was almost impossible to realise in practice, as their experience suggests, and in many ways, I believe, ran counter to the creative process in the long run.

Cooper (1976) argues that structure and process are complementary situations which have a cyclic relationship flowing through the breakdown of structure into a temporary immersion in process resulting in a new, more creative structure. The structure and process, he argues, must be balanced, an emphasis on either one producing an uncreative situation, too much structure resulting in a linear development proceeding from a pre-set purpose, *"from the known to the known"*, whilst too much process leads to chaos:

*"It is questionable whether men can assume the process form for long periods without dissipating themselves into chronic non-structure, for example, madness and chaos."*

(Cooper 1976)

The creative artist, he argues, uses their environmental resources to "*cultivate their own varied possibilities.*" They reject prior purpose and structure, adopting a wealth of possibilities in every resource, valuing every contingency as a potential source of growth. This process is only a temporary situation, resulting in a temporary plateau of structure which will disintegrate in order to develop.

The notion of process became a straight jacket for Today, they had their interpretation of the creative process and tried to make the play fit in with it, rather than develop an approach to each play depending upon their individual requirements. The notion of process was ironically fixed for the duration of the project, an unquestionable structure of the group running counter to flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of the group or indeed the text.

The group thus once formed upon the ideology of collectivism and process seemed to be constrained by a narrow interpretation of them which was rejected or ignored in private by some of the group, but never openly questioned. This was doubly ironic because collectives are created to give their members freedom from bureaucratic, structural barriers to individual expression and control over their lives.

Rothschild-Witt (1979) poses the collectivist organisation as an alternative to the rational bureaucratic organisation.

Decisions being ideally reached through consensus, there are minimal rules and regulations, decisions, she argues, which are generally settled as the case arises and suited to the demands of a situation. Jackal and Levin (1984) commenting on the paradoxes of collective work note:

*"The central paradox in the Cheeseboard, which affects all other aspects of the collective, emerges from the democratic structure of the store which allows workers great freedom of individual action and expression. The product of such freedom, even among people with somewhat similar backgrounds and experience is an ongoing state of open conflict and tension. Clearly workers in traditional bureaucratic workplaces also experience conflict, but the structural root of this conflict is not freedom but rather a competitive constriction. Further bureaucratic structures repress and contain conflict rather than allow it free expression. The collective, however, even while it generates conflict, depends for its success on cooperation and negotiation. As a consequence there is a disparity between the structural genesis of conflict in the cooperative and its functional imperative for cooperation."*

(Jackal and Levin 1984)

Today, however, seemed to fear this freedom for conflict within the collective, and chose to ignore the ability to redefine the meaning of work and group relationships inherent within

collective structures. Collectivism seemed to be imposed upon its members some of whom did not fully understand the opportunities it provided, the time available to work on the idea of collectivism being extremely limited. Collectivism as Jackal and Levin admit can be very time consuming:

*"The freedom that collective work gives people makes even the accomplishment of routine tasks an arena for the struggle of personal wills."*

(Jackal and Levin 1984)

Today lacked the time to focus on the requirements of collectivism due to the encompassing nature of their work in the small time they made available for themselves, which indeed seems to be typical for most theatre groups. Callow (1984) states that:

*"The actual rehearsal period is so short and critical that there is simply no time for major questions to be broached."*

Thus, they lacked the commitment to give the precious resource of time to the demands of collectivism and concentrated on creativity, on the task of the play. Time thus became a structural constraint on the individual's freedom to define their social reality within the collective. They could not afford to seriously undermine the status quo as it would be too time consuming a process, and thus expressed dissatisfaction in terms

of petty squabbles or withdrawal from the supposed collective processes.

With their poor reception on tour and amongst the theatre critics, alongside the increasing strain of their work the problems mounted for the group, but so did the threat of exposing them, they became increasingly vulnerable from attack from within the group, and consequently the blaming of their problems on the text became a vital tool for their survival. I do not think that if pushed they really believed that this caused their problems, but it was believable and this is what is most important. It was plausible enough an explanation to allow them to avoid facing any potentially threatening conflict as they saw it.

This suggestion that the Brecht created their problems by making them alienated from one other and individualistic rather than cooperative, was, I felt, not a reflection of their subjective interpretation of events within the group, or even of an attempt to mislead outsiders that all was well. It was a necessary fiction which had to be unconsciously maintained and never questioned so that they could avoid looking at their group processes in any depth and discovering how badly they were working together and risk creating more conflict than they would solve, particularly when time was short with performances and tours looming up all the time.

As I stated earlier, collectivism requires a lot of conscious commitment and discussion about approaches to working as a collective which an already overworked theatre group could ill afford. The result of tackling the problems may have outweighed the gains they would have made at personal level if the deep rooted causes of the conflict were openly exposed. By tacitly accepting the safe explanation of the text causing their problems, and consequently that the problems lay outside their control, they at least ensured that the group survived, and was thus able to put on a performance each night. And in many ways despite their varying motives for joining the group, through accepting various fictions, they ensured their own survival. Rather like Humpty Dumpty, having fallen off his wall; once certain problems are exposed they can never be put back together again in quite the same way as they were before.

Their vulnerability as a group lay, I felt, in the fact that whilst they were formed with the official agenda of putting out spectacular performance, in practice their creativity rested in their group. I felt that they were interested in creativity for themselves and in their ideals as a support to their self-image, and thus something not to be challenged. They wanted to believe that they had created a collective experimental theatre group, and that it had been successful, and yet they were rigid in their notions of process, and unconvincing in their performances before the theatrical audience. The existence of the group had in fact become an end in itself and contradictions between their ideals

and experience were ignored or defined away, and when tensions became more apparent it was blamed on the text.

They seemed to be extremely defensive about their group, and of their need to protect their vision of it. I felt that this lay behind their treatment of me as a researcher. I was part of their fiction of a belief in process and thus granted access to rehearsals, but then feared because I might expose or question the myth, and thus constantly held at a distance. They regarded society generally as a hostile phenomenon which could threaten their group and were conscious of the need to protect themselves. Dave told me that:

*"Capitalism alienates people, and so it is very important that we work hard to oppose this and develop the group identity. No-one else will help us. So we've got to look after the group."*

Their behaviour can be understood if one sees them as an audience to their own creativity. I have already suggested in Chapter Four that their lack of polish stemmed more from a lack of concern for the paying audience than because it represented a well thought out, and more importantly, developed notion of process. The process was primarily for themselves rather than to convince their audience of their approach to creativity and hence emphasis was placed on experimentation and discovery rather than the means for expressing this.



There is obviously some dilemma for the artist portraying process where to find the balance between experimentation and expression. Callow (1984) recognises that too great an emphasis of the final product in a performance can render it a bourgeois objet d'art rather than a vital communication. However to convincingly convey one's process in skilful manner is not to contradict ones very assumptions about process as we can see if we turn briefly to the world of fine art. Picasso in his Cubist works seriously challenged conventional notions of product in the fine arts by capturing process on a canvas. By simply presenting clumsily performed images one is demonstrating more of a lack of rehearsal than a convincing set of ideas.

I did not feel, however, that they were particularly concerned with conveying their ideas to the audience, and that the clumsiness did not particularly matter, because they were concerned with process for themselves. They wanted to experiment with new styles of working, with new approaches to a text, with the exploration of the creative process rather than a process which results ultimately in a final product. They wanted to create and maintain a group for themselves as an audience to their creative process, with the performance before an audience not as an ultimate goal, but as part of a performance for themselves. As Kathy put it:

*"The prime motivation of the group is the group."*

They were concerned with what they could learn from the project, and how it would help them to develop politically and theatrically. They could gain skills and confidence in an industry characterised by high unemployment and increase their chances of joining professional fringe theatre groups, and gain personal satisfaction from thinking they were a part of an experimental theatre group living by their politics. As Barbara states:

*"Now I've done this I can say, I've done this, I can work collectively, I can direct, I can act."*

Even the politics which were to be *"infused throughout the creative process,"* were important more for the members themselves, in many cases, than for spreading an evangelical message. Kath admitted that:

*"I never joined this group with the idea that I was going to materially change anything in the outside world at all. It changes things for us eight, and it changes perhaps the way in which we can work in the future."*

Starr (1979) distinguishes between two types of alternative institution - the "exemplary" and the "adversary". The exemplary institution, he argues, seeks to work by its politics, whilst the adversary institution is primarily concerned with altering the social order. The former exemplifies within its own structure and

process its ideals for society, whilst the latter may, or may not, adhere to the values within its own organisation, that it hopes to realise for society.

Whilst I feel that Starr's model is rather simplistic as it does not allow for multiple motives and even conflicting aims within the alternative institution, or that the reason for joining an organisation may be different from the reason for staying, it is an interesting notion of the organisation which functions as an end in itself and the organisation which is merely a means to an end regardless of how the members get there. The latter category would include the agit-prop theatre groups Terry so scathingly attacked (Chapter Four) for preaching political values which weren't reflected in their work. Today fitted more into the exemplary organisation hoping to live and work by their politics and improve their understanding of them in the process. It seems ironic that the conflict would suggest a heightening of collective consciousness from some of the group and a resentment of Nicki's domination, but that they didn't feel able to challenge it, and accepted less collectivism to maintain the organisation. They seemed to move into the latter category whereby the ends justify the means even though the end was the exemplary organisation.

Their behaviour can be best understood as a method for maintaining or enhancing a perception of self. They all, to varying degrees, placed their political and aesthetic beliefs and talents in the project, and thus sought its success in order to

maintain a self image; had they felt that their beliefs had failed, then an important part of their self image would have been seriously undermined. Paradoxically it was not the beliefs, but their abandonment of them in principle so often, which caused many of their problems. Lack of political consensus between the group, and differing levels of understanding and commitment to the ideals were not discussed, and caused numerous difficulties for a group which was inexperienced with an enormous workload of touring two plays in England and North America.

I felt that the group was operating on two different levels of reality. At one level they were formed to create a theatre which involved interpreting a Brechtian text, working on an expression of this interpretation and presenting this to an audience. At a second level they had created a group to experiment with their politics and the creative process, creating a fiction for themselves that they were performing theatre, whilst performing this fiction for themselves. They were not performing theatre in the usual sense because they were not concerned about their audience, ignored the theatrical conventions to convey their ideas, and failed to convincingly express their interpretation of a text on stage. They even ignored their emphasis on collective working for the most part and yet maintained a fiction for themselves that its breakdown rested in the text not with them.

I felt that their group had become an end in itself, with its members to varying degrees creating for themselves and maintaining

a completely different fiction with themselves as the audience without letting the official audience into the secret. As a researcher I became part of their fiction by reinforcing their belief in process, and yet was also a danger because I might raise issues which could shatter a fiction, hence my usual treatment outlined in Chapter Three where I spoke of the various techniques they adopted to distance me from them.

There was thus a fiction of the group as a theatre group when at best it was theatre workshop sustained by varying fictional realities such as their definitions of collectivism and interpretations of conflict which enabled them to avoid unwanted interpretations of events which might shatter their illusion. It was all a tacit rather than a conscious process with fictions evolving out of one another rather than being deliberately created.

As I shall argue in the following chapter in more detail, their fiction become more apparent by locating the group in their social context. If one sees the group as fairly talented Oxbridge graduates with presumably quite favourable life opportunities with parents prepared to finance them for a year, then one can see that they didn't have to be successful at an organisational or financial level, but could try to be successful at an ideological political level. I felt that they wanted to make their ideals work, but that they were overly idealistic in hoping to collectively direct and collectively participate in all areas of

the creative process, and put in two tours in England and one in North America. As the strains mounted, however, and the ideals began to collapse rather than change how they worked, or what they planned, they developed various supporting fictions and slowly became increasingly removed from their official agenda into preserving their organisation for itself. Thus it was more of a tacit evolution or an emergent process rather than a consciously planned attempt to mislead either themselves or the public. Hence at the back of their minds or when I pushed them they could admit to a subjective interpretation of events, admit that they didn't like the play or Nicki's way of working for example, which did not accord with their fiction.

Thus the fictional reality involved a tacit process of a acquiescence rather than a deliberate attempt by the Today Theatre Group to mislead themselves or others. It is a reality which can be best seen as lying on a continuum somewhere between a subjective interpretation of reality and impression management. It is a concept which provides an additional explanation of human behaviour whilst also recognizing the creative capacity of the actor as an audience to their own performance.

The "Today Story" is thus a story of ironies, paradoxes and compromise. It involved the management of contradictions and varying levels of understanding of political ideals on the basis of one common aim, the survival of the group, for the group. The various processes were understood to varying degrees by the

members of the group depending upon their political sophistication and reflective processes. It involved acquiescence for the sake of expediency and for some unquestioned acceptance of the group's behaviour and the explanation of its problems. This resulted in Nicki's continued domination of events, though with increasing uncertainty over his position, but more positively with some hope that they might find the time to face up to some of their organisational problems when the demands not so great aesthetically are as when they are simply reworking old material. Time and confidence to question the situation when members of the group were less vulnerable and more open to change could have altered their situation as collectives have in theory no structural barriers to change; such barriers lie only in the consciousness of their members.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**BEYOND PLAYING GAMES**

*"They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play their game of not seeing I see the game."*

(R D Laing)

Throughout this thesis there has been an underlying theme which uses the theatrical process as a metaphor for the research process. I have deliberately chosen the language and style which lies somewhere between the conventions and 'jargon' of academic research and those of theatre. I have asked my readers to enter into a fiction and interpret implicit themes rather than explicit theoretical constructions. I have spoken of fictions, of subtext, and of audience as key concepts which highlight my theoretical concerns, but have left the reader to follow these signposts (stage directions would be perhaps to overwork the metaphor) and make interpretations of their own of my research experience.

I have thus concentrated on capturing the atmosphere of my involvement with the Today Theatre Company back in 1982. I have discussed my feelings on this experience and presented their accounts of events, minimising the theoretical interpretations, and allowing the unfolding of events to speak for themselves.



This has hopefully given the reader freedom and inspiration to make some interpretations of the subtext for themselves. Knowledge, as I stated earlier, is a process, and thus cannot be presented as a series of definitive statements, and should therefore engage people in a process rather than simply feed them.

I thus thank the reader for being an active participant in this fiction rather than a passive receptacle to fixed theoretical notions.

In this chapter I shall, however, develop some of my ideas in more detail, draw the various themes together and show how they relate to one another, providing some greater depth which will highlight the importance of them. In doing this I hope not to disrupt the style of this thesis so far, and thus view this chapter more as an epilogue which enables the reader to depart from my fiction with most of their questions answered, but hopefully with some new questions of their own.

The central concept of this chapter towards which the other theoretical constructions are directed is that of a fictional reality. I have spoken of various fictions throughout this thesis and feel it is time to clarify this concept in greater detail. Firstly let me state that there is not simply one fictional reality, but rather a layering of fictions of fictions within fictions, rather like a series of Russian Dolls. Thus there are the fictions of the Brechtian play which reflect Brecht's comments

on capitalism and a Chicago he has never visited. There is the fiction of the Today Theatre Company interpreting this text, and putting on a theatrical presentation of their interpretation which draws upon contemporary culture before an audience, whilst in many ways being more concerned with interpreting the text for themselves, experimenting with ideas for their own sake, and creating a group for the group. Because this group becomes an end in itself then any behaviour which they see as potentially threatening to its existence is a serious threat to their fiction and must be dealt with. Thus they created definitional vacuums in their interpretation of collectivism as a sharing of commitment rather than power, enabling Nicki's power to continue unchallenged, and maintained a fiction that this was unimportant. However tensions did arise which continued to threaten the group, and so the notion of the text causing their problems was seized as another fiction which saved them.

Then there is the fiction of my interpreting Today interpreting Brecht. I watch their behaviour and interview them in order to make my own interpretation of events and give meaning to actions which are not always the same as their interpretation of events. I do not suggest that they are wrong, I simply maintain the right to make my own subjective interpretation of events as I perceive them. I have made conscious choices as to how I present this interpretation, bearing in mind the audience to my fiction, just as they were influenced by their chosen audience, who I feel was often themselves. I then assume my audience to

interpret my interpretation of Today's interpretation of Brecht's interpretation of capitalist society in 1923, and possibly present this to another audience of their own choosing.

Secondly, as well as involving a layering of realities, these fictions can be more or less consciously created. I hope to show that people are less cynical manipulators of their realities and tend to create fictions unconsciously, though they may be less conscious of their actions at some times than at others. Lofland (1976) talks of the relationship between strategic interaction and strategic consciousness. He argues that there is a tendency sometimes to overimpute strategic consciousness where none exists, presenting an image of people as consciously choosing and engaging in actions to deal with areas of concern. He adds that an action may in fact have a strategic significance without a strategic consciousness on the part of the actor. Someone may act in a way which has systematic, malevolent consequences for another, he argues, without any consciousness, intention or conspiratorial meaning. For example, indirect racial discrimination can have discriminatory effects on members of ethnic minorities without any conscious intent on the part of the discriminator. This does not in any way excuse the individual involved, but serves to reflect and perpetuate the deeply rooted institutionalisation of racialism in society: thus the criticism of racist jokes and language by members of minority ethnic groups due to their feelings that these exacerbate their position in society.

Lofland is also keen to point out that the dangers of viewing people as puppets and pawns by an underintentionalising within sociology which encourages people to deemphasise a belief in their own intentionality. He uses the example of the man who blames his wife for his being overweight because she leaves too much food around the house. This, he argues, reflects a bad faith declination to assume responsibility for one's own actions.

I am not questioning the level of responsibility that the individual has over their actions, but the level of conscious manipulation over their behaviour. I accept Sartre's thesis that *"we are condemned to freedom"*, that people have no essence which could determine what they shall do, but are free to become anything:

*"Man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders: he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being."*

(Sartre 1969)

I have already stated in Chapter Two that we are ultimately free to make any interpretation of events and select behaviour accordingly, though there are social norms and conventions which tend to prevent us from doing this. Having said this, however, the question of intentionality still remains. Thus one aspect of symbolic interactionism which I criticised earlier for presenting a too cynically manipulative view of human action, preferring to

view people as primarily acting in a situation, making rationalisations for their behaviour after the event. We do not, generally speaking, pre-plan our behaviour, or consciously create a fiction for ourselves unless we are writers or story tellers. Thus, the essence of a fictional reality is that it is largely an unconscious process, though some fictions may become more apparent to the actors as a fiction than others. We are neither cynical manipulators, nor are we totally naïve, and we may have a strategic consciousness of the strategic significance of our fiction, or of one of our fictions. The fiction then becomes a new fiction because the individual who has realised that a fiction is in operation, has to decide whether anyone else in their social context has realised this too, and whether they would disrupt the fiction by stating that this was what it was, or whether they have all tacitly agreed not to explicitly reveal they all know what is going on. Thus the fiction shifts emphasis and new layers of fictions are created to support the original fiction which may have even become meaningless by now, the maintenance of the new fictions for themselves having become the prime aim of the organisation.

This leads us into the third characteristic of a fictional reality, that they can be quite vulnerable to exposure by an individual or group of individuals "seeing through" the fiction and exposing it as such. Thus they depend upon unspoken tacit processes rather than explicit behaviour, they must be unconsciously accepted at many levels (because conscious

realisation alters the fiction) and maintained before a carefully selected audience which will not challenge it.

The audience is thus the fourth element of the fictional reality. The fiction is, I shall argue, largely for the performers as an audience to their own fiction, but this will usually involve some interaction with outsiders, who may unwittingly become part of the fiction, but who will also watch and interpret this fiction. Thus they may accept the fiction as it is presented to them as nothing more than the performance before them, or they may see through this performance, look into the subtext, and then consciously become part of the fiction or even choose to expose it. There is a choice to make a new fiction or to unwittingly enter into an existing one.

The relationship between performers as audience to their own fiction and the audience to this fiction is full of tacit negotiations and implicit power relations. They may try and exert their power over their audience to present an interpretation of events of their choosing. As McGrath (1981) put it:

*"You go into space, and some other people use certain devices to tell you a story. Because they have power over you, in a real sense, while you are there, they make a choice, with political implications, also which story to tell and how to tell it."*

(McGrath 1981)

However, theatre is about a relationship between stage and audience, and the audience cannot always be relied upon to give the same interpretation to a performance as the actors involved. The audience is in a potentially powerful position to withhold their applause, to refuse to laugh and even to get up and walk out of the theatre if they do not like the fiction they are being presented. Similarly within interaction, the audience is potentially powerful in that they can expose the fiction and so the performer must use their power vested in their being on stage to manipulate the other's interpretation of events.

However life is not theatre. A play depends upon bringing life to a script and communicating this life to the audience using certain techniques and conventions:

*"When we enter the theatre and agree to participate in the performer-spectator transaction, we automatically apply those codes specific to the performance - theatrical codes - that permit us to apprehend it on its own terms, and not as say a spontaneous and accidental event or a piece of film."*

(Elam 1980)

Interaction relies on various codes too (as I recognised at the start of this chapter when I stated that I had not adhered strictly to academic conventions), but control over the audience is less, and its ability to interpret events and destroy our fiction thus much greater, because the codes are less fixed than

those operating in theatre. The communication is more directly two-way, and thus the need for defensive strategies can be seen as far greater, depending upon how conscious the performer is of their fiction, how intangible their fiction is, and how perceptive they see their audience to be. Thus to allow a researcher into an organisation as part of one's fiction is to make oneself extremely vulnerable because their task is to interpret and reflect upon events rather than accept them at face value. Thus the research process can involve a number of unconscious power processes. These power relationships differ from the traditional conception of power in that it is not an intentional power relationship but a tacit process only arising within the situation itself and entirely dependent upon each other's perception of the power of the other.

It is an extremely subtle process whereby one person may exercise power over another without consciously realising that this is what they are doing. Just as with the separation between strategic consciousness and strategic consequences outlined earlier, power can be exerted without the individual interpreting it as such. The audience within a theatre will probably not be conscious of their power over the performers vested in their ability to accept or reject the performers' interpretation of events.

This process of power has been seen most clearly by the feminist movement which centres on the notion that 'the personal



is political'. Feminists have been concerned with reinterpreting events in their lives where they have not previously perceived a power relationship in their interaction with others. Thus they have attacked sexist advertising which may not be intended to exert power over women, but in effect by demeaning or stereotyping them does just that.

*"We can conceptualise ads therefore as representing a particular articulation of capitalist production and consumption. But in that articulation, they also particularly, if not exclusively, operate through ideological representations of femininity. This ideological work relies on, but also constructs, an ideology of femininity which is completed through our collusion as we read and consume the ads. We are just spectators who gaze at 'images' of women as though they were set apart, differentiated from the 'real' us. Within the ads are inscribed the images and subject positions of 'mother', 'housewife', 'sexually attractive woman' and so on, which as we work to understand the ad, embroil us in the process of signification that we complete."*

(Winship 1982)

Thus because the power is not immediately apparent in the situation, the powerless often collude in their own demise:

*"It must be admitted that males find in women more complicity than the oppressor usually finds in the oppressed. And in bad*

*faith they take authorization from this to declare that she has desired the destiny they have imposed on her."*

(de Beauvoir 1953)

Feminists have paid particular attention to the presentation of women in literature and to definitions of power concealed within symbolic structures, recognising the hidden process of power within the subtext:

*"When we turn from the political statements about power to the literary works that may bear upon them, we turn from the abstract to the imagined specific, and not just to specific characters in specific circumstances but to the deeper specification of meanings through language, imagery and structure."*

(Bellow-Watson 1982)

Bellow-Watson identifies a progression within womens' studies in literature focusing initially upon images of women, (dominant among these being the sex object) towards a treatment of women as subject as a movement towards redressing their power within society:

*"We need to observe women in literature as acting and perceived, not as acted upon and perceived."*

(ibid)

She considers the experience of women in regard to power within literature and suggests that like other minority status groups they conceal what power they do have and avoid anything that looks like threat or competition:

*"We must not expect either the literature written by women or that written by men based on their observation of women to tell us much about so sensitive a topic in the forms of declarations, manifestos, plot summaries, or even the broad outlines of characterization. We begin instead to look at such techniques as ambiguity, equivocation and expressive symbolic structure."*

(ibid)

To put this simply Bellow-Watson is recognising that there are fictions about power within fiction as the term is commonly used, that is, in literature. Having recognised that all actions are ultimately concerned with power relationships, the traditional powerless are careful not to explicitly state their potential power which rests in redefining themselves and the powerful. Women can choose to reject the fiction that they are powerless, dependent creatures and challenge the dominant societal fictions which maintain their low status in society.

Interactionism is a valuable tool in providing access to the illusive concept of power because it recognises that ultimately this is dependent upon the interpretation of the actors within a

situation. However, by rather naïvely missing the politics of the interpretive process, most interactionists assume an equality of power in the interactive episode removed from any social context which is usually used as a mechanism to legitimate the power of the powerful over the powerless. The latter cannot always challenge the access of the former to better material rewards but they can challenge their definitions over them as powerless which is part of the insidious process of power often at an unconsciously intentional level.

Walker (1983) is concerned with the individual's ability to take control of their life by seeing their potential to define themselves rather than passively accept the racial and sexual stereotypes which serve to make the powerless collude in their own oppression. In her novel the Colour Purple we witness the slow coming to consciousness of her own personal power of Cellie through conversations with her friend Shug Avery, as we see in the following extract from a letter to her sister:

*"Well, us talk and talk about God, but I'm still adrift.  
Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been  
busy thinking bout him I never truely notice nothing God make.  
Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple  
(where it come from?). Not the little wild flowers. Nothing.*

*Now that my eyes opening, I feels like a fool. Next to any  
little scrub of a bush in my yard, Mr.....'s evil sort of*

*shrink. But not altogether. Still, it is like Shug say, you have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything a'tall.*

*Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he aint. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it , tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock."*

(Walker 1983)

The feminist view of power is interesting to us here, less because it provides an insight into womens' role within society, but because they discuss the power potential within situations, and explore the possible shift from powerlessness to power within, if not indeed potential power over another. Within the research situation I argued that the researcher can be perceived as a threatening 'expert' or observer who may destroy a group's fiction having its tenuous existence in its unspoken separateness from reality as the various members see it. Thus they may move from powerlessness as they seek a group prepared to accept them and must accept the conditions forced upon them, but by gaining insights into the group may gain a potential power which they do not intend to realize over the group or even in some cases become conscious of it. Their power rests not in the intentions of the

researcher but in the perceptions of the researched just as it does in other arenas where people interact.

Power is thus less of a material phenomenon than a social construct which is dependent upon the interpretation of the actors in a situation. It can be used as a defensive strategic process to prevent others gaining potential power over you, by blocking access to one's subjective interpretation of events: for example, by issuing political statements rather than discussing personal feelings and exposing potential areas of vulnerability. Or it can be vested in another where they are seen as having power over you whether they intend this or not. Thus we can create fictions about our power to protect our other fictions, or unwittingly accept fictions about our powerlessness to support another actors' fiction, becoming involved in their fiction without consciously realising it. However, by bringing another into your fiction makes you vulnerable to exposure, hence the various strategies at ideological, economic and infrastructural levels to prevent someone exposing it.

An individual, however, surrenders some of their power to expose a fiction once they themselves become a part of a fiction, with a vested interest in maintaining it, because they have placed definitions of themselves in the fiction and do not want to challenge this. This is all negotiated at a tacit level, however, for people do not consciously realize that they are operating on a

number of layers of fictional reality, supporting one another in their various fictions and preventing others from exposing them.

This can be understood if once again we turn to literature. The Glass Bead Game tells the fictional biography of Joseph Knecht who rises to the pinnacle of Castalian society as the Magister Ludi of the Glass Bead Game. He slowly comes to realise that this society devoted to the strictest disciplines of learning has become an end in itself, removed from any relationship with or relevance for the wider society which it is supposedly serving. Having become aware of this fiction of Castalia, he can no longer unwittingly remain a part of the fiction and thus prepares to leave it for the outside world, but first conveys his fears in a circular to the board from which the following lines are taken:

*"If, now, we regard our Order as a nobility and try to examine ourselves to see to what extent we earn our special position by our conduct towards the whole of the people and towards the world, to what extent we have already been infected by the characteristic disease of nobility - hubris, conceit, class arrogance, self righteousness, exploitativeness - if we conduct such a self-examination, we may be seized by a good many doubts. The present-day Castalian may not be lacking in obedience to the rules of the Order, in industry, in cultivated intelligence: but does he not suffer from a severe lack of insight into his place in the structure of the nation, his place in the world and world history? Is he aware of the*

*foundation of his existence; does he know himself to be a leaf, a blossom, a twig, or root of a living organism? Does he have any notion of the sacrifices the nation makes for his sake, by feeding and clothing him, by underwriting his schooling and his manifold studies? And does he care very much about the meaning of our special position? Does he have any real conception of the purpose of our Order and life?"*

(Hesse)

Knect was part of an organisation which, for its members, had slowly become an end in itself whilst nevertheless maintaining the fiction of serving a wider purpose. He tried to inform the senior members of the hierarchy of his insights, knowing it to be in vain because it was too devastating a revelation, and accepting their polite rebuttal of his circular left Castalia and no longer participated in its fiction, and by doing so allowed the rest of the board to repair the fiction as well as possible by castigating Knect as ill disciplined or self-centred, misunderstanding their ideals.

In Trollop's The Warden (1964) we see the exposure of another fiction this time by an outsider who questions the unfair distribution of John Hiram's Will between the Warden and the old beadsmen living in Hiram's hospital. When the story begins there are faint whispers which question the rightness of the arrangements, but Mr Harding doesn't question, or not more than faintly, his right to receive eight hundred pounds per annum, nor



do the beadsmen question their one shilling and four pence per day: each one, "*considered as well-to-do in the world according to their condition.*"

However, in The Warden a young radical, John Bold, destroys this easy quiet by questioning the terms of the Will and the fairness of the distribution creating a national scandal of the situation. For the Archdeacon there is only one course of action to fight the radicals and restore the status quo but for Mr Harding the issue of the disparity once explicitly stated could not be ignored:

*"I cannot boast of my conscience when it required the violence of a public newspaper to awaken it, but now that it is awake, I must obey it."*

(Trollope 1964)

He can no longer be a part of the fiction exposed by an outsider and resigns from his position as Warden.

In both tales the main protagonists are unconsciously supporting a fictional reality until they either become aware of it or are made aware of it, and can no longer be a part of the fiction because it would involve a more cynical acceptance of the organisations of which they are a part. After their respective changes of awareness, both characters prefer to mould new fictions for themselves: for Knecht, so that he can become a part of the

outside world, and for Mr Harding, so that he can still remain within the church.

A fictional reality is thus not part of an individual's subjective interpretation of events, for they can separate a 'subjective' view of the organisation or of themselves from the fiction they are unconsciously accepting; and by using various layers of fiction avoid this subjective interpretation of events. If they become aware of the fiction it no longer constitutes a fiction and must be abandoned or cynically maintained for others which renders it impression management. Neither does the fiction become a part of an internalized value system because of its separateness from the individual's interpretation of events and is thus not self deceit as much as avoidance. It is therefore quite a tenuous reality which can be destroyed, and this involves the individual in some tacit power negotiations, and some explicit power manipulations to the extent that they are aware of the strategic significance of some of their fictions, which may protect the less consciously recognised fictions. Thus fictions may be consciously created as in literature where the author sets out to create an illusion with a layer of implicit fictions which are not consciously created as fictions, but are more unconsciously accepted, though only at a fictional rather than a subjective level.

The individual is not deliberately deceiving themselves or others but is holding different layers of realities within their

consciousness, and enabling themselves to behave in different ways as situations require. They can impression manage, and can act on a subjective interpretation of reality, but can also, which I feel tends to be ignored, act somewhere between the two, on the level of a desired image of themselves, created for themselves, rather than for others, and thus often unconsciously maintained as a separate reality from the other two. We do not operate at the level of a fictional reality all the time and tend to accept a subjective interpretation of events different from our desired wishes which we might try to convince others is real. We may get so caught up in presenting the desired image for others that we almost start to believe it ourselves, and get caught up in our fiction, or someone may suggest an interpretation of events differing but preferable to our own which we come to accept as the source of the fiction. It must be considered theoretically, however, as a separate layer which can almost be seen as a gell between subjective inter-pretation and impression management, between ideals and experience, between contradictory experiences and the heart of many paradoxes.

Fictions are a process and can include many fictions, some more encompassing than others and some more explicit than others. So to relate this to the theatrical process, there is the fiction of the text and there are fictions within the subtext, the unspoken level of events, and fictions created by the actors interpreting both the text and the subtext for the theatre audience and for themselves. Thus the audience for these fictions

can change, impression management could even be seen as a fiction for an external audience alone, though central to this concept of fiction here is the self as the primary audience for whom the fictions are maintained.

The concept of the individual deceiving themselves is not in itself very new. It has been explored in both psychoanalysis and in philosophy, though it is assumed to be a problematic state because the individual believes their own illusion and it becomes delusion. Curle (1972) suggests that we all have hidden fears and guilt about our lust, violence and general wickedness. Rather than acknowledge these things, he argues, that we dissociate ourselves from them by the psychic trick of projection. It is not we who are bad, it is they. The mechanism by which we get rid of our badness he calls mask and mirage technique:

*"The mask is the disguise we put on to fool ourselves and everybody else. It is what we would like to think of ourselves as being. Everyone has a mask affecting his perceptions of himself. Indeed, we have usually lived with our masks so long that we fail to recognise them for what they are."*

(Curle 1972)

Curle goes on to argue that others are less taken in by our masks than we are. A mask, he argues, in the psychological as well as in the material sense is rigid, unchanging and continuous.

What we do, therefore, often belies what we are trying to be and thus contradicts the pretensions of the mask. When this happens, and people fail to accept our mask we feel threatened by whatever it was originally constructed to save us from. One remedy for this situation is the mirage which is:

*"A false image that we see squinting through the slits of the mask. We see our enemies, associates, and friends in the very shapes and shades we had obscurely sensed to be our own but had, through the use of the mask, repudiated and denied. The mask in short, enables us to see in others what we fear to see in ourselves (the mirages) and to see an equally unreal but this time idealised picture of our person."*

(ibid)

The mask and mirage formation fluctuates continually being weak when stress is low or awareness is high, and strong when the opposite conditions prevail. He thus presents is as a technique behind which the individual can hide when they feel under great stress and are unable to see clearly about ourselves. He argues that what we perceive about the inner world determines what we perceive about the other. If our self perceptions are dull and distorted it is unlikely that we will perceive others clearly and accurately and thus blame them for the faults within ourselves, leading to aggressive intransigence in our behaviour because of the perceived position of the other. It is a technique he uses to describe chauvinistic militaristic attitudes through which a

person sees themselves as being defensive and the other the aggressor. It is a technique of self deceit which becomes internalized and determines actions rather than a fictional reality which is an account of events separate from the individuals' interpretation of reality.

In philosophy we have the Sartrean notion of Bad Faith through which the individual, albeit unconsciously, denies the level of freedom available to them to make choices. Sartre outlines the process by which an individual can achieve peace of mind by engaging in a particular 'method of thinking' which disregards factual evidence, and allows the individual practising Bad Faith to avoid reality by hiding 'a displacing truth or presenting truth as a pleasing untruth'.

Cumming (1965) emphasizes the distinction between Bad Faith which can be viewed as a lie to oneself from lying in general because:

*"The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding.... The liar intends to deceive and he does not seek to hide his intention from himself nor to disguise the translucency of consciousness."*

(Cumming 1965)

In Bad Faith however the individual is involved with a lie to themselves:

*"Bad Faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in Bad Faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist."*

(ibid)

With a fictional reality the actor is neither a deceiver nor deceived because they do not take on board their fiction as of their subjective interpretation of reality, nor are they consciously trying to present a falsehood to others. Its essence being its separateness from these processes.

A fictional reality must be plausible enough as an account or way of behaving so that it will not be openly questioned and the actor forced to consider their subjective interpretation of events which may be less desirable in that they see themselves as in fact less powerful or central to the organisation that they would like to think they are, or not working according to their beliefs. Take for example the personnel manager who operates a rationalised selection and recruitment programme based on application forms, interviews and aptitude tests, and yet tends to recruit from word of mouth referrals. They are maintaining a fiction of a fair and open recruitment programme and yet if questioned would have to admit to the strength of their informal practices with all the

discriminatory effects of such an approach. They may maintain a new fiction that informal recruitment was cheaper or better for the organisation and reaffirm their role as efficient members of the organisation, but left unchallenged they probably wouldn't recognise the disparity between their recruitment apparatus and recruitment process. The referred candidate is probably led to believe that they are competing fairly with other candidates and are either unwitting additions to the fiction or enter into the fiction themselves that they were only selected because they were the best person for the job.

A fictional reality then whilst it is not a delusion of the self, neither is it an attempt to present the individual in the best light to others. It is less manipulative than the process of behaving outlined in Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959). The basis of his approach is that:

*"When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate or exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact than does his behaviour as a whole."*

(Goffman 1959)

If the individual is to convince their audience of this ideal image of themselves they will have to consciously manipulate, or conceal actions which are inconsistent with these standards. They must consciously attempt to mislead others and behave in



unacceptable ways only in secret. Thus Goffman uses a series of dramaturgical metaphors to illustrate this process. He talks of "Audience Segregation" by which the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in a different setting, thus protecting the various impressions they create in their various audiences.

Goffman uses the concept of a team which includes two or more performers each of whom are involved in presenting their own special performance in collusion with one another - thus there are people in the know before whom a particular impression cannot be maintained. This is developed into the concept of the back stage area where the performer can relax and drop their front, respected by the audience who will help the performers to save their own show.

Goffman accepts that a team may even stage a performance for an audience that is not present in the flesh and must therefore become its own audience. The show is not however for the performers for there is an implicit concept of an unseen audience. He cites for example the funeral ritual in a mental hospital whereby all the officials perform a ritual burial for the patient with no relatives or friends. The ritualised behaviour and adherence to social norms is not for the performers but the unseen audience.

Goffman also recognises that the individual may be taken in by their own act, convinced that the impression of reality that they foster is the one and only reality. The performer then comes to be their audience, acting as performer and observer to the same show. Goffman however refers to this process of self delusion as occurring when an individual is suffering the psychotic problems of repression and dissociation.

There is a tendency to view the self as audience to a performance as problematic resulting in either self delusion or schizophrenic process between the self deluding on one hand, watching and believing it on the other. This problem stems from the assumption that an audience is an external phenomenon rather than an internal process, and that behaviour is ordinarily a rational rather than spontaneous process performed often without conscious consideration of its consequences. We can see these problems inherent within the interactionist perspective which tends to focus on the modifying role of the audience rather than the creative possibilities of interaction for the actor themselves.

Implicit in the concept of audience within social psychology is the notion that the actor modifies their behaviour on the basis of their perceived audience whether it be a "reference group" (Shibutani 1961); a "specific or generalised other" (Mead 1934); or an interactive team (Goffman 1959). The audience is considered to be part of the social encounter from which we draw meanings and

for whom we convey an impression to our self. We may have several audiences all requiring different ways of behaving and providing us with different experiences and values, but common to all these theorists is the external situation of the audience.

Shibutani (1961) views the individual as a participant in a number of social groupings in a variety of social worlds, each requiring different ways of behaving and providing varying perspectives from which the individual assesses their own behaviour. Shibutani refers to these social groups as reference groups, to which the individual can either belong, or simply accept its value system without being a part of the group itself:

*"The concept of a reference group may be used to designate that group, real or imaginary, whose standpoint is being used as the frame of reference by the actor."*

(Shibutani 1961)

The reference group supports the value in terms of which a person estimated their own conduct, their actions therefore depending upon the real or anticipated reactions of the other people for whom they are performing. Shibutani thus acknowledges that everyone acts for some kind of audience, and that there is a "selective sensitivity to others." People are not equally responsive to the attitudes of everyone present, and furthermore the audience that counts need not consist of people whom one knows personally at all:

*"People are selectively responsive primarily to the reactions of those who are included in their reference group, for they seek to maintain their position largely in their eyes. Self conceptions are constantly subjected to reality testing and the confirming responses of others provide the necessary support."*

(ibid)

Thus the individual will modify their behaviour in order to gain acceptance of those individuals who comprise their various reference groups in order to reinforce their conception of self.

The individual's perception of the audience as mediated through the "Me" is central to Mead's Interactionism as described by McCall and Simmons (1966).

*"One monitors oneself throughout the process (of interaction) and from a multiplicity of perspective and contexts. And it is this organisation of multiple perspectives and contexts for reactions that is the "me" in Mead's terms. The "me" is best thought of not as the antagonist in a multiple discussion with the "I", but as an audience, all the people in a multi person discussion who are temporarily silent while the "I" holds the floor."*

(McCall and Simmons 1966)

The Me thus constitutes an internal audience which mediates the behaviour of the I through perceiving the reaction of others. We become socialised into certain ways of thinking and behaving through our consideration of the attitudes of what he calls the "generalised other":

*The organised community or social groups which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called "the generalised other". The attitude of the generalised other is the attitude of the whole community."*

(Mead 1934)

It is in the form of the generalised other, he argues, that the social process influences the behaviour of the individuals involved in it. By this he means that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members through the individual considering the attitudes of the generalised other towards them.

The self is viewed as a social construct within interactionism, a construct which gains its meaning in the social context through the mediating influence of others. Whilst I do not dispute this perspective I feel it ignores the creative potential of the individual. If we can create in an artistic or scientific mode why not at an interactive level? If the artist can create primarily for themselves why cannot the individual

interact primarily with themselves as an audience to the performance, and indeed create realities for themselves?

Let us briefly reconsider some of the arguments of Chapter One where I criticised approaches to creativity which viewed creativity as a process which resulted in an original product to be critically acclaimed by an expert audience and perhaps given a financial value. I suggested creativity could be of value for the artist themselves, dependent upon the meaning they gave to creativity, and their perception of whom they were creating for. If the audience to the creative process was the artist themselves then the process of creating rather than the final product could be a reward in itself.

This distinction, I believe, can be applied to interaction. Individuals can presumably interact with one another with more concern about their performance for themselves than for the impression they are making on others although the others are important because they could shatter the actors' performance. There may be multiple audiences within a situation, as has been recognised by interactionists, though they need not necessarily all be external to the actor. Creating a fiction can be for itself rather than for the benefit of others. It can serve to confirm a self image without becoming a part of an individual's value system.

Thus an individual can present a fictional reality not because they are deluded or are acting in Bad Faith, or because they simply want to mislead others, but because they are the audience to their own fiction and want to believe it because it enables them to create and maintain even larger fictions through avoiding unwanted realities.

One of the keys to unravelling the concept of a fiction lies in the notion of the subtext that is the behaviour which is omitted, the unspoken lines which convey meaning to the performance presented on stage, and which contains the history of the actors involved and the all revealing social context without which actions cannot be fully understood:

*"If in ordinary life there can be no present without a past and a future, in the theatre, which mirrors life, it cannot be otherwise. The playwright gives us the present but in some ways he also give us hints of the past and future."*

(Stanislavsky 1961)

Understanding behaviour as with interpreting the text in theatre becomes easier once the individual is located in a social context. One of the problems of interactionism is that it treats behaviour as a series of episodes, ignoring the fact that we do not operate in a social vacuum, and by locating the group or individual in a setting interpreting the fiction becomes a much easier task. The social context for Today was that of an

alternative theatre collective established by young Oxbridge graduates as an expression of (for at least some of the members) their idealism. I have already established earlier in this thesis that the motives for joining the group were not the same for all the members, some seizing the opportunity to perform rather than express a political consciousness or commitment. Bearing this mixture of motives in mind, the group all to a greater or lesser extent accepted and understood the formal ideals of the group to work as an experiential theatre collective.

They were young, well educated in a formal sense which presumably provided them with certain potential employment opportunities, and were supported either by their families or social security whilst working on the project. It was not therefore either their sole life opportunity or even a means to their livelihood. The fact that they decided to form for one year only, however they rationalised this decision as permitting greater commitment to the organisation, also served to perpetuate the transience of the organisation, reinforcing to them that they needed to succeed in theatrical, financial or market terms but in personal terms, because they were expressing their ideals and beliefs rather than trying to make a group work. They did not have to court their audience, and create a loyal following which would ensure their future survival because survival was not tied up with the group, nor was their future.



I think that their lack of material investment in the organisation, and their high personal idealistic investment provides the key to understanding their behaviour. It meant that firstly they could afford to create a fiction for themselves as they did not need to create an effective fiction for the public audience, and secondly that they could not personally afford to destroy their fictions because they had immersed the self in the form of their idealism in what they were doing, and were too egotistically bound up in maintaining fictions to support their overall fiction of being a collective theatre group experimenting with contemporary culture and the creative process to put on exciting performances. They were not collective in the sense of sharing power and decision making, they did not like the play they were performing, or contribute to the process of creating it, did not like the style of rehearsing the play and put on poor performances, and yet continued to work as a group and avoid acknowledging these problems openly. They were highly effective at their own fictions because they could not personally afford not to be.

Rothschild-Witt (1982) distinguishes between employee owned firms based on a threat of unemployment and those based on the threat of underemployment. The first category involves industrial workers who have never thought of collectivism before, but have been drawn into cooperatives out of economic necessity. The second are characterised by well meaning liberal arts graduates

who are experiencing great difficulty in gaining a job they would consider doing.

There is an obvious distinction between the workers in the Garment cooperative studied by Cornforte (1982) which was set up to create jobs for some of those made redundant when a local hosiery factory closed and the members of the alternative institutions in Rothschild-Witt's (1982) study. In the garment cooperative most of the workers were women from working class backgrounds employed in the garment or hosiery business before joining the cooperative. When interviewed most members said that they did not really know what a cooperative was until they came to work there. Their only prior experience of a cooperative having been shopping in the "Co-op". One member suggested that:

*"You can't think of a co-op unless you're in it, I didn't come here for the co-op, I came for the job."*

(Cornforth 1982)

Contrast this with the alternative institution which according to Rothschild-Witt are:

*"A statement of alienation from and a rejection of mainstream organisations, at the same time that they are a positive attempt to live out one's values. For them, to use the feminist slogan, 'the personal is the political'. They believe their most important political message lies in their*

*very act of co-operative work: insofar as they accomplish the job at hand without resorting to hierarchical patterns of authority, they demonstrate that democratic management can work."*

(Rothschild-Witt 1982)

Thornley (1981) argues that there are two distinctive strands of the cooperative movement which should be separated, the collectives and others. The class nature of each giving them a different ability to survive. Many of the workers in a collective are, he argues:

*"....middle class, with personal access to professional help, with educational qualifications that give them opportunities to find alternative employment, and sometimes safety net in their families should they fail. Their ideology behind their efforts is of outstanding importance to them. They are more free to experiment with new democratic forms. They have a better chance of surviving but it matters less if they fail."*

(Thornley 1981)

It may matter less in strictly financial/employment terms because they have qualifications which render them access to conventional markets but if, as Thornley recognised above, their ideology is of outstanding importance to them, then the apparent success of the ideal, if not the material success of the organisation, may matter very much indeed. Energy within the

middle class idealistic collective may therefore be channelled more into maintaining the organisational ideals, than making the organisation effective in market terms. The members may create a barrier around themselves which enables them to ignore the outside world. This barrier is in effect a fictional reality that they are not a part of the capitalist system they despise, and that they need to consider working effectively within it if their organisation is to survive. Thornley stresses this paradox of the collective organisation:

*"In fact , it is their ideology which encourages cooperatives to cut themselves off from the market and to find protection in the labour and cooperative movement. But cooperatives are a response to the effects of capitalist production and their whole existence is bound into the capitalist system."*

(ibid)

Today, by forming for one year, and by not seeking Arts Council subsidies or financial support for their performance, ignored the theatrical market and were totally bound up with their fictions. They did not, however, use this freedom from the market to concentrate on their collectivism, but rather ironically when faced with the conflict engendered by collective working, ignored the roots of the conflict, and sacrificed collectivism in order to save their ideals in their rhetoric if not their practice. They thus in effect created a freedom for themselves which is normally

a fiction for most collective organisations, and then created a fiction of collectivism for themselves.

Their behaviour is interesting for four reasons. Firstly, because their creativity at an interactive rather than at a manifest level produced valuable insights into understanding both the research process and human behaviour. Secondly because it reflects the importance of ideals as part of the self for which fictions must be created for defensive or creative purposes - to defend a fiction or create a new reality for the individual as audience to their fiction. Thirdly because having led me to the notion of fictions it also demonstrates the various possibilities of fictions and layering of fictions within fictions. So that whilst some collectives try to define away the capitalist market place whilst in effect operating within it, Today far more successfully ignored the market place because they had created a fiction for themselves primarily, rather than create an exemplary organisation whose audience is the members and the outside world. Fourthly, an analysis of their behaviour destroys the notion of rational almost cynical manipulation of behaviour implied by interactionists and puts forward a more egotistic view of behaving with the self as the primary audience for interacting.

Theatre thus provides us with an extremely valuable metaphor for understanding behaviour. The process of interpreting behaviour and giving it a meaning which is the basis for a performance can then be developed to a view of individuals

interpreting the unspoken text as a basis for their performance too. It provides us with the view of creativity within a performance and even of fictions within fictions. That we may consciously create a fiction which is supported through layers of unconscious fictions all of which are separate from the other layers of reality available to us. It reminds us that interaction is a process and that fiction can change, awareness of realities can change and so can individual consciousness and even the power relationships.

It is an approach which places interpretation as the cornerstone of human behaviour and redresses many of the weaknesses of the interactionist perspective namely its restricted concept of audience, overemphasis on rational processes and assumptions of equality between interactants which all stem from a tendency to ignore the social context.

The subtext overcomes these weaknesses by allowing us to recognise the interpretive power process and the importance of the social context in shaping an individual's behaviour. But most importantly it is the creative potential of the interactant and the process of creating for themselves which must be remembered when viewing human behaviour. If one sees the research process as outlined in this thesis as another metaphor analagous to the theatrical process, one can see behaviour in quite a simple way as a creative expression of an interpretation of various events designed largely for the self because it feels good, because we

like to think we are 'nice people' or successful people or whatever, and do not want others to destroy our fictions because we cling fearfully to them at an unconscious level.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE FINAL ACT: THE VIVA

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have maintained an analogy between the theatre and the research process. I have argued that both involve presenting an interpretation of a text with a particular audience in mind. The difference between the two being that theatre is essentially a live performance whereas a thesis, or a research article, largely remains as a written text. However, there are arenas within academia specifically for bringing the text to life, each with its own staging and directions such as seminars and conferences.

Thus the culmination of the research process for me was not submitting for examination but the viva performance itself. This provided me with the opportunity to enact my script, to bring both text and subtext to life as I presented my interpretation of events to the examiners. It was a performance which allowed me to further understanding of some of the main concepts in the thesis, and which enabled the examiners to raise questions as is part of their role as audience and performers.

The viva took place several months after completing writing the rest of the thesis. During this period I started work as a manager in a homeless mens' hostel and half forgot about my work. However, when I came to re-read the text prior to examination I



found that I was still struggling to find the most comprehensive way to demonstrate the notion of a fictional reality. It is a dynamic concept involving layers of reality, described earlier as being like a Russian Doll. I realised that much of what I wanted to say was very complex, and much more suited to three dimensional sculpture than the written word. This was indeed reflected during the performance by much waving of hands whilst I communicated my ideas.

The stress of the impending performance stimulated me to bring along some props for illustrating the concept of a fictional reality. These I hoped could help to compensate for the difficulties I had in writing about it. Armed with my props I nervously went on stage, knowing that I was not only presenting myself but my creation too.

The stage was set with four easy chairs arranged in an informal fashion around a coffee table, creating an illusion of informality which contrasted sharply with our formal attire. Everyone was in dark suits which gave a solemnity to the occasion, distinguishing it from a research seminar or conference. No doubt conveying the seriousness with which we were all taking the next few hours. Starring in the performance was myself and the two examiners, with a supporting role (literally and metaphorically) from my supervisor.

The viva started with my external examiner asking me about the last sentence of the thesis, in which I spoke of the necessity to latch onto a fictional reality for fear of discovering a less pleasant picture of self. I was immediately thrown by what I felt was a miscue having expected the drama to unfold much more gently. Like all good performers I began to improvise but quickly redirected the performance with a rehearsed speech about process.

I delivered an outline of the process of writing the thesis whilst I settled down into the performance I was about to play. One of the problems with actors inviting audience participation is that they can never fully predict their audience's response. I was now in that situation, stunned by this immediate focus on the major theme of my work, having expected to chat about the weather, or at least the field of work as a warm up in the first few minutes. I thus had to wrest some control from my audience by delivering a rehearsed speech whilst I gained confidence on stage.

The discussion throughout the afternoon was thereafter to centre on two main themes, the balance between process and product, which provided the subtext to our discussion, and the concept of a fictional reality which dominated the text. The former being considered less contentious than the latter.

In one of the major speeches of the afternoon, I delivered a long monologue in which I explained that I had in fact written a much more straightforward first draft of the thesis in which I had

presented a chapter on creativity, a chapter on collectivism, another on research methods, and so on. Whilst the first draft was based on the same reading and data as the second, I felt that it "lacked" something. It presented a picture of events as neatly separated episodes discussing when the group were being collective or creative or involved in power relationships.

Whilst such an approach may result in a piece of work which is straightforward and easy to understand, I argued that it lacked the essential quality of dynamism which characterises our interaction with others. It presented a false picture of reality as a series of vignettes rather than an unfolding drama, with each scene relaying to the other. I wanted to reflect the various strands of my eclecticism and to present the interweaving of human interaction between various events. I told the examiners that I wanted to demonstrate the parallel experiences of theatre group and researcher in both the content and style of the thesis, capturing the process of behaving as well as producing a thesis for examination.

I explained that I wanted to show how various insights into behaviour could be fused to create a deeper understanding of behaviour as a process rather than describe an episode or series of isolated incidents. I informed them that I had utilised the insights gained by directors working in the theatre, or expressed by authors in their novels rather than rely on academic theory alone. I had also applied insights into the creative process of

theories of human behaviour because all these writers, each from their varying perspectives, had all made valuable contributions towards understanding the human condition. I wanted to develop themes alongside one another to illustrate a sense of growth and inter-relatedness of experience, rather than present a fixed episode. The result, I argued, being possibly more confusing but also more comprehensive.

It appeared that the examiners were all satisfied with my use of a less academic style to convey a theoretical standpoint through the vehicle of my writing. Nonetheless, they wished to re-address the concept of a fictional reality, which they felt had been promised in the final chapter and didn't feel had happened. Thus the main focus of their questioning centred on the notion of a "fictional reality". They had three complaints about the concept. Firstly they feared that I hadn't been specific enough about the term and that it was in danger of becoming so all encompassing it was rendered meaningless. Secondly, that I had simply "reinvented the wheel" by describing delusion or illusion under a new name. Finally, and relating to the first two, that too much of the final chapter hung on the notion of a fictional reality, and that the concept was both overworked and forced onto an interpretation of events.

I felt that these complaints were understandable, but throughout the discussion of the afternoon, I attempted to convince the examiners otherwise. I recognised that there was a

danger of the concept of a fictional reality becoming overworked. It could easily become another way of suggesting that all of life was a performance or simply a game. I had no intention in suggesting that we had a fictional reality of recognising that all of life is a stage; Shakespeare had summed this up centuries ago, and the dramaturgists developed the insight very successfully.

In by far the longest speech of the afternoon, I argued that the term was far more precise than this. I argued that it referred to a specific layer of reality distinct from the mundane level of interaction upon which our everyday behaviour is based. A fictional reality, I suggested, refers to the process whereby an individual latches into an explanation of events which enables them to avoid looking any deeper into a situation and confronting a potentially less pleasant subjective interpretation of reality. It was a process of tacit reality acceptance rather than active interpretation or conscious manipulation of a self. To actively recognise a fiction, I suggested, would be to recognise the need for a fiction, and however fleetingly, the unwanted in interpretation of events.

I put forward the view that the fictional reality thus constituted a separate layer of reality held conceptually at a distance from a subjective interpretation of events. Thus we were able to hold a subjective interpretation of reality simultaneously with a fictional reality. It was a reality, I argued, which we would immediately hold up as our interpretation of events, but if

pressed we would be forced to recognise a deeper internalised version which we would consider the "objective reality" in lay language. Hence, I stated that it was not a process of delusion or illusion because we were not deceiving ourselves or another, or accepting a fantasy. We were accepting a plausible version of events, maintaining this before ourselves and others, all of whom were equally eager to accept this definition of events.

This fictional reality, I insisted, is one which we were able to hold separately from our conscious interpretation of events if we were to reflect with any seriousness upon our behaviour. It was an accessible and more digestible reality that enabled us to continue a performance without too much reflection which may raise less pleasant motives about our behaviour. Its essence was that the fiction was accepted for the actor concerned rather than to present a desirable impression before others. To consciously manipulate behaviour for others would have been impression management.

I suggested to the examiners that the fictional reality was a sensitising concept which depicted an additional layer of reality, filling a theoretical vacuum between the symbolic interactionist understanding of everyday behaviour, and impression management. It presented a notion of an additional layer to reality, acting as a social cohesive between these two quite distinct layers of reality. At this stage in the proceedings I drew upon one of my

props to help demonstrate the role of a fictional reality in bringing opposing ideals and experiences back into a harmony.

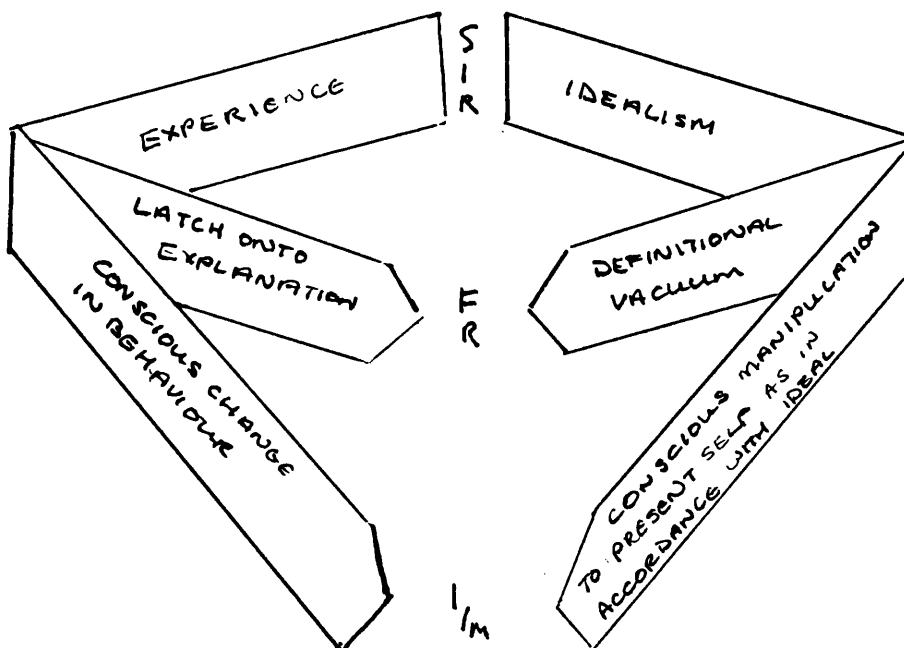
Behaviour, I explained, is basically the result of a dialectic between idealism taken to a situation, and experiences within the situation. Where experience is made to fit an ideal, rather than the ideal arising out of an experience, the ideals become a constraint on behaviour. If the experience cannot be constrained and fitted into the ideal, then the two will pull in opposite directions. By latching onto a fictional reality, I suggested, through redefining the experience, and/or the ideal, and thus creating a new dialectic at the level of a fictional reality, the individual actor was able to continue performing. This process must be tacit, or else the subtle shift in definitions could not be accepted. These subtle shifts could build upon themselves until the individual had a number of fictions upon one another.

However, if the individual was less concerned about the separation between what they wanted and what they experienced, they can present a picture for others as if what they sought was indeed what had happened. This I argued constituted the outer layer of reality in the illustration called impression management.

Indicating towards my illustrations I suggested that when the ideals and experience are pulling in opposite directions, the individual may latch onto a definition of these which is not internalised, but which constitute a separate layer of reality I

have called a fictional reality. This serves to bring the opposing forces together enabling a performance to continue. Had they consciously adopted a desired performance for others it would have been impression management conceptually further away from their subjective interpretation of events as shown in the illustration below, with the fictional reality lying between the two.

Prop 1: An illustration of layers of reality used at the viva



Key

SIR = Subjective Interpretation of Reality

FR = Fictional Reality

IM = Impression Management



The fictional reality, I suggested, was not in a fixed position between these two extremes, but should be seen more as providing a continuum between subjective interpretation and impression management. At times the fictional reality moving closer to the subjective interpretation of reality where it only differs slightly from the actor's internalised perception of events. At others it may be moving closer to impression management as the actor becomes increasingly cynical about their own behaviour and that of others.

The essence of the concept, I pointed out, lay in its passive acceptance enabling a possibly less pleasant interpretation of events to be ignored. It thus lacked the concrete base of an internalised interpretation of reality, or of the strength of a need to convince others, thus, I argued, it was a rather fragile process, depending on others for its maintenance. I was questioned whether in fact this made it a norm. I explained that within symbolic interactionism there are recognised norms and conventions which serve to maintain social reality for actors within any episode. However, with a fictional reality there is a reliance upon unwitting compliance from the audience not to reveal it as such. This creates the interactive, rather than the structural power relationships as was discussed earlier in the thesis. Any actor becoming aware of the fiction must either expose it as such and risk being excluded from the group, or leave. Otherwise they must enter into the dangerous quagmire of wondering whether everyone knows they all know, but are pretending

not to know, as we see in Laing's Jack and Jill with its tortuous psychological knots.

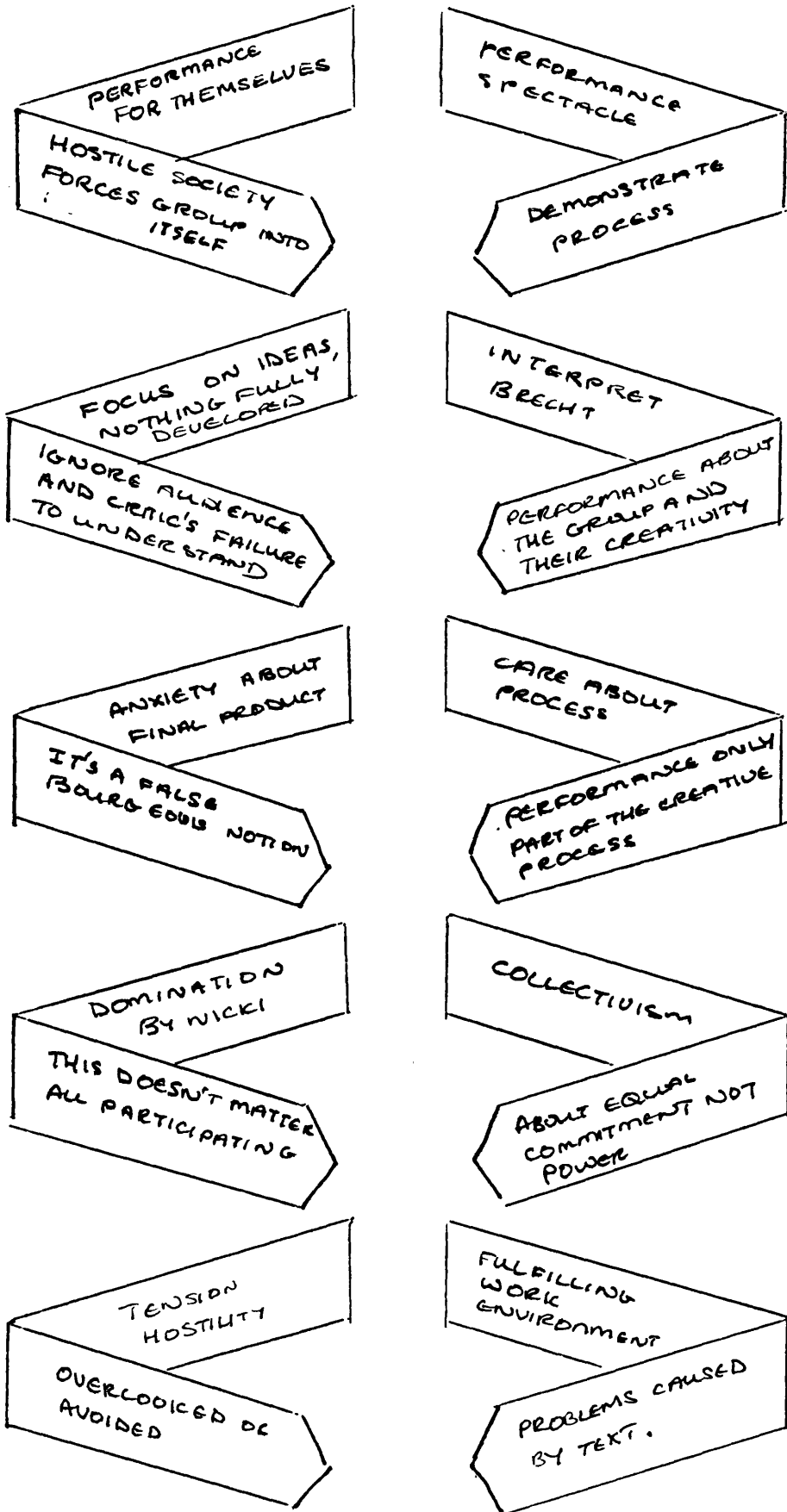
I pointed out that with the theatre group in this case study no member of the group was going to expose the fiction that the group was not working according to their own ideals, because they all wanted it to succeed, even at the cost of sacrificing their principles. Joseph Knecht, however, in one of other examples, considered his sense of self as a principled person greater than the fiction of Castalian principle.

I found myself in a difficult position when next asked whether I could extend this concept to other situations. I explained that within the viva situation, for example, one could identify three layers of reality in which we were operating. Firstly, there was the obvious impression management as I tried to sell my ideas to the examiners. There was subjective interpretation of reality as we all gave meaning to the situation to enable us to interact, but what about a fictional reality? I suggested that the fictional reality we were experiencing in the viva may have something to do with notions of academic excellence which enabled us all to consider ourselves experts. Possibly this was in fact the fiction which we were all glad to sustain to enable us to act out our parts as academics. I stated that I certainly wasn't going to be too controversial and risk calling anyone's bluff.

I said that I thought this example illustrated how fictions can build up within fictions, that by accepting one fiction at a more conscious level, other more tacit fictions can also be supported. Just as a definition of a situation in fact can be based on years of previous experiences brought by each actor to the situation, so a fictional reality can be based on a number of complex processes which are difficult to extrapolate.

To illustrate this process more clearly I talked about the process of fictions taken from my field work study. I presented the illustration below (see Prop 2) and explained that along the rear axis is the subjective interpretation of reality. Coming out from this on one side is the group's presentation of their ideals as put forward in their publicity blurb and statements on their work. On the other side, pulling away from the ideals was their experience of working within the group. These opposing forces are pulled together by a redefinition of their ideals and experiences into a cohesive fictional reality, which constitutes a separate axis, or layer of reality. Thus, where ideals and experience were pulling away as outlined in the rear arms of the diagram, by accepting a fictional reality, they are brought together again, and the group continues to survive. Thus I had written the fictions presented to me in interviews redefining their ideals and experiences in the front arms of the illustration. I explained that I hoped this second prop captured some of the dynamism and sense of layering explained in my writing.

Prop 2: An illustration of the fictional reality created by the  
Today Theatre Group



This concept, I argued, could be applied to other situations and groups, not just those with a particularly strong ideological bias. I had used this group as an illustration of a theory, although I stated that I felt certain that it could equally be applied to any other group or organization. It is possibly more apparent with the Today Theatre Group because of their freedom from market pressures and constraints, but no less meaningful as a concept because of this. It was, I suggested, essentially a model for understanding behaviour as a process rather than describing the product of behaviour in an interactive episode.

I explained to the examiners that I recognised that this was a difficult concept to explain, and that I could have set myself a far easier task by simply writing about power or collectivism. My work, I argued, would have lacked the fusing of the various experiences in both the research process and the theatrical process as experienced by Today, and myself. It would possibly not have recognised the importance of the subtext, of the actors' perception of their audience, of the self as audience or the potential for creativity in our interaction.

In a passionate speech defending my work, I stated that such an approach would have missed the essential question "why". Why did the collective become dominated by Nicki? Why did no-one challenge this? Why do we want to ensure that our ideals work? It was the vital link that our ideals play in our concept of self

which we seek to build or maintain which necessitated this precarious fictional reality.

Thus it was that we came back to the opening question of the viva on the final sentence of the thesis. It had now become apparent what I had meant by talking of our fears of exposing a self which we may not like. Whilst the concept had raised possibly more questions than it solved, by the end of the afternoon we appeared to have agreed that it did help to explain part of the behavioural vacuum between a subjective interpretation of reality, and impression management. However, this may have been a convenient fiction on which to conclude the performance.

It had been a long and emotionally charged afternoon. What had been demonstrated was the power of the concept to generate discussion and to sensitise us to an area of "reality" that warrants further work.

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